

TODAY'S FICTION — TOMORROW'S FACT!

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# AMAZING ANC STORIES



WEAPON from the STARS By ROG PHILLIPS  
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# The OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

ONE OF THE curious sidelights of science fiction, we find, is the very real and personal interest its fans take in the people who write for that type of magazine. Every month we get scores of letters asking for information about favorite authors—where they live, whether they have families or starve in garrets alone and unloved, what their hobbies are, how they go about writing stories, etc. Even that old, old question every professional writer hears hundreds of time: "Where do you get your ideas?" comes up again and again.

MOVIE STARS and professional athletes, we're told, arouse that same interest among their followings. But in other fields of writing, such seems not to be the case. Western and detective story readers keep their attention pretty much on the stories themselves, with only an academic curiosity about the personalities behind the by-lines, judging from their letters.

JUST WHAT KIND of men (women rarely write science fiction) DO write for *Amazing Stories*? From our own knowledge, we'd say they were about the same as the men working in any other line of business where the brain is more active than brawn. Most have families and, in a necessarily absent-minded way, are usually devoted to their wives and children. (We say "necessarily" because any writer is forced to spend so much time free of interruption while he dreams up plots, that he can't help forgetting now and then that he IS married and a family man. Some wives get used to it; many others crack under the strain, head for Reno or its equivalent and end up marrying some guy who can't even write his name!)

FOR "KICKS", perhaps you'd like to hear your editor's impressions of the regular contributors to *Amazing Stories*. Let's start off with Rog Phillips. Rog is an inch or two over six feet, a native of Washington (the state, that is), and gives the general impression of belonging behind a tractor mowing the hay on the east eighty. He's single at the

moment, uses a garret only to store away the money he makes as one of the most prolific of today's science-fiction authors. He's especially (we almost said inordinately) proud of having written two or three pocketbooks, has a deep and sincere interest in stf fans and their activities, and plays gin rummy and poker with boundless enthusiasm and very little skill.

THEN THERE'S Robert Moore Williams. Bob is in his early forties, slightly balding, married and the father of a daughter much better looking than her old man. He's a resident of St. Louis—works hard at his trade and takes a completely justified pride in his ability at it. Bob is one of the widest selling magazine writers in the business and he wouldn't know what a garret was if you built one on his desk! He also happens to be one of our favorite people.

WE INTENDED going ahead with this listing but space is running short. If you'd like the inside dope on other of our writers, let us know. We'll be only too happy to oblige. (It's not libel when it's the truth!) —HB



"Tell me, what's the biggest problem you Martians have here on Earth?"



# AMAZING STORIES

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## All Features Complete

THE OBSERVATORY By The Editor	3
BAD LUCK DAY By Jon Barry	45
AUTOMATIC TRANSLATOR By J. R. Marks	45
MAN IS THE MEASURE By H. R. Stanton	67
THEORY LEADS TO FACT! By Carter T. Wainwright	67
NITROGEN TORCH By William Karney	118
THE PLANETARY JACKPOT! By Milton Matthew	119
PLEASANT DREAMS By A. Morris	119
FOOD FOR THE MIND By Cal Webb	119
THE COMPLICATED ATOM By Ramsey Sinclair	145
THE INSCRUTABLE GOD By Sandy Miller	146
THE MAMMOTH SLEEPER By Charles Recour	146
COMING ROCKET CAR By John Weston	147
THE CLUB HOUSE By Rog Phillips	148
FACTS OF THE FUTURE By Lynn Standish	154
THE READER'S FORUM By The Readers	158



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Illustrated by Julian S. Krupa

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Illustrated by Edmond B. Swiatek

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Illustrated by Arthur Huth

Can a man actually die when he's on a planet where the inhabitants don't believe in death?

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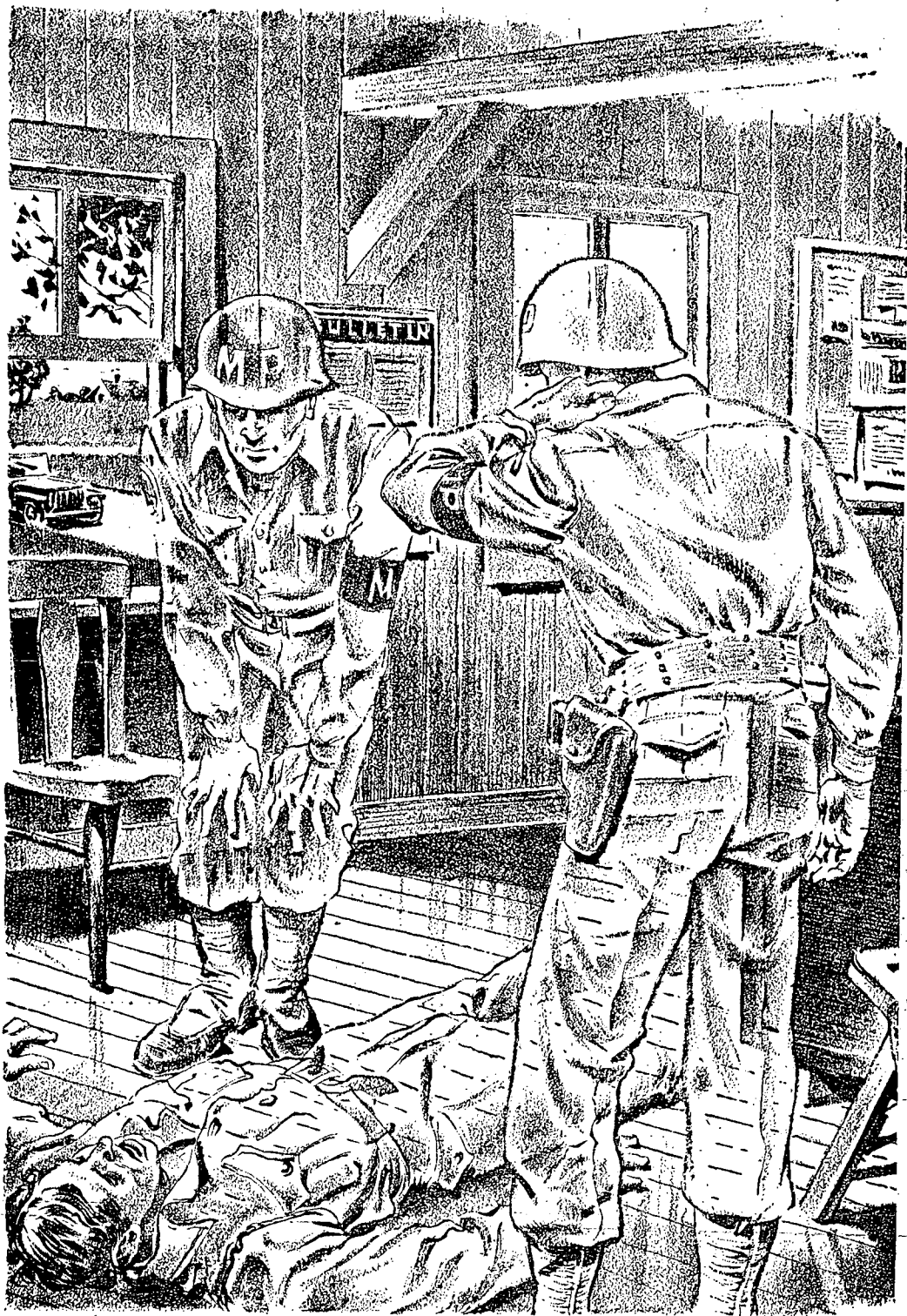
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If you wanted depraved lusts, the Hotel Luxor was the spot. But Crag was just a decent crook!

Cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating  
a scene from "Weapon From the Stars"

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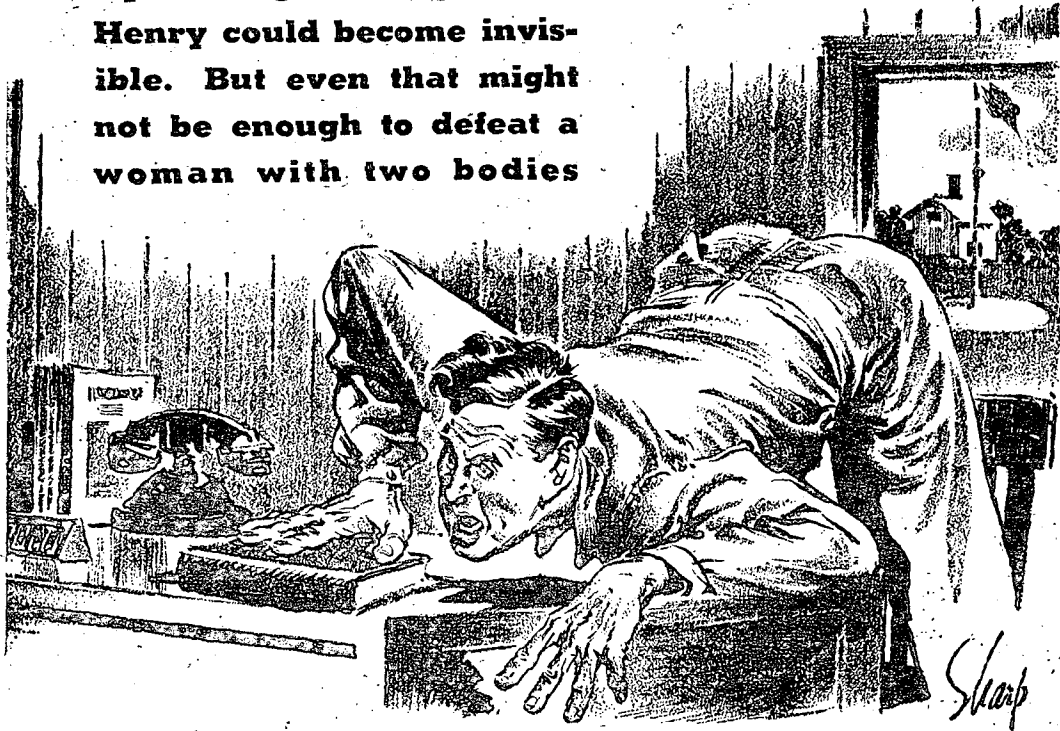
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This time I didn't disappear. But my body did, and so did both the armed guards as well!

# WEAPON from the STARS

By holding the magic coin,  
Henry could become invis-  
ible. But even that might  
not be enough to defeat a  
woman with two bodies



*By Rog Phillips*

“**H**EY JOE, look at the mail order clerk!” The coarsely built man who had spoken nudged his companion, who turned his eyes, stared in mock astonishment, then burst into loud guffaws.

Henry Prince flushed under their stare, turning away in pretended indifference.

“Look at them pretty fingers,” the second man said in overdone admiration. “What’s your name, mister?”

“Henry Prince,” Henry said politely.

“Henry? Gawd!” Joe turned to his

pal. “Think of that, Al. We can’t call him Hank because he isn’t the type. And *Henry*! Nobody would be caught using the word.”

“Leave him alone,” someone farther down the line growled. “He’s here for the same reason you are; to make enough dough in two years to retire on.”

“If we live that long, and come out of it able to enjoy living,” another said.

“Cut that out!” another said sharply. “You know damn well there’s no radio-activity left there. They wouldn’t dare lie about that.”



"Oh, wouldn't they!" came the retort. "They'd lie if they couldn't get the workers without lying. Think they could get us, or anybody, if they came right out and said in two years we'd be so radio-active we'd die before we could enjoy what we come away with?"

"Then what are you in this line for?" Al said.

"He's wrong," Henry Prince spoke up. "I've read the details. There *was* radio-activity, yes. But they've covered the whole ten thousand square miles with fifteen feet of concrete. That's a perfect shield. They had to or there wasn't any use in starting construction. Nobody could have lived in the building when they finished it."

"Then what do they pay such big wages for?" the stubborn one said, a trifle too loudly. "Why do they keep hiring more men? When will they get enough? What happens to those that've been over there two years already?"

"Yeah," a new voice picked it up. "What's a thousand dollars a day for two years if we don't live to enjoy it?"

"Are you, by any chance," Henry Prince asked, turning to the man, "paid to enter this line and start rumors that will make the men back out?"

"Listen, you little squirt," the stubborn man sneered, "shut up before I knock your teeth loose."

"I see you avoided answering my question," Henry said, a nervous smile flicking across his face.

"Yeah!" Joe said, looking at Al and nodding. "Why didn't you answer his question? Picking a fight with the half-pint ain't an answer."

"Ah, shut up," the man said. "I noticed you were trying to pick a fight with him yourself."

"Gentlemen!" Henry said. "If he's a hired agent to drive applicants

away he'll drop out of line before he reaches the employment office. That way we'll know for sure, and can have him arrested and put in the treason trials."

"The heck you can," the man said, edging out of line. "Me, I'm having no part in putting up this building in what's left of Europe. The rest of you can go over and get poisoned by radio-activity and be damned!"

He edged further from the line. The other man who had sided with him was also inching away.

"Get back in line!" Al sneered. "You can't back out now."

For answer the two men took to their heels. Instantly Henry Prince was running after them. Al and Joe passed him, each tackling one of the fleeing pair.

When Henry reached them they were rolling and scuffling, the two more intent on escaping than in fighting. Henry chose one pair of fighting men and poised over them. Suddenly he seized a wrist and ducked under it, turning his body as he did so. A man miraculously lifted out of the twisting mass, turning lazily over in the air, to land on his back with a loud thump. What was left of that maelstrom of flesh, namely, Joe, rose with a bewildered expression on his face, watching with something close to awe as Henry repeated his performance on the other pair.

"Now let's all get back in line," Henry said, "before we lose our place."

"Say," Joe said to Henry, "you're all right—Hank!"

"NAME?" the tired man at the desk asked.

"Henry Prince. The two that came in ahead of me are suspected agents. What're their names?"

"Paul Granch and Harry Lark. They're signed up and can't get away."

"Good," Henry said. "You know my orders. I'll really sign up now and go across with the group."

"Dependents?" the tired man asked, ballpoint pen poised over the blank form on the desk.

"Mother. Marie Prince, 1408 . U Street, Novark, Washington."

"Age?"

"Twenty-eight. The two coming in next—Joe and Al—I want with me. On the same plane. In fact, assign them to the same job with me and those two, Paul and Harry."

The questions went on until the sheet was filled out.

"Through that door," the tired man said, pointing with his pen.

Henry went through the door and found himself in a large waiting room whose windows opened onto a concrete strip on which a huge transport plane idled.

The two men named Paul Granch and Harry Lark were together near one of the windows, talking uneasily; their eyes studying the plane and the chained off lane leading to it from the waiting room, with armed guards standing back far enough to bring down anyone who tried to escape.

Henry smiled quietly, merging with the crowd so that he wouldn't be observed. Shortly he sensed someone stop beside him, and looked up. It was Joe, his eyes and coarse face friendly and curious.

"How'd you do it, Hank?" he asked.

Henry blinked his eyes, then comprehension came.

"Oh," he said, "I had a friend who was a jujitsu teacher. It really wasn't anything. I will admit it's the first time I ever tried it on a stranger, though. Unfair, really, but a minute more and we'd all have been arrested."

"You sure you just hired up for general labor?" Joe asked quietly.

"Of course," Henry said, looking

surprised. "That's where the money is. The bosses don't make a thousand a day."

"Screwly setup," Joe said conversationally. "Workers get a thousand a day while wages at home are fifteen and twenty a day. And still they can't get workers. Maybe if they only offered thirty a day they'd get more. That doesn't sound like a suicide job then."

"You know the alternative," Henry said. "They're trying to keep from having to conscript labor, and if the Government can't keep on schedule with this construction work by hiring men, and won't conscript labor, then the Lotissivians will drop an occupation force and make us do it their way."

"Yeah," Joe said glumly. "And what's a thousand a day? They take back nine-tenths of it in income taxes, and the rest is just paper money, easy to print, worthless except that people in business have to accept it."

Al came through the door from the employment office, his eyes surveying the room until they found Joe and Henry. He pushed through the crowd and joined them.

"I think I was the last one on this load," he said. "And what a load! Must be a hundred and fifty in here. If they all go in that plane out there they'd better make the trip quick. There won't be room for a slice of bread to make us sardines into a sandwich." He looked down at Henry's five-foot-eight from his height of six-five and smiled. "Think you could flip me like you did those two? Never mind, don't show me!" He backed off in mock alarm.

"We three'd better stick together," Joe said. "No telling what's ahead, and three's company."

"You mean three's a crowd," Henry said, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"So what, professor?" Joe said. "We may need to be a crowd. Them two we mussed up are just the type to knife us if they get a chance."

"Ever see either of them before?" Henry asked.

"Not me," Joe said.

"Me neither," Al said.

A loud voice broke in from the door to the airport.

"All right," it shouted. "Get moving. I want this room cleared in five minutes. Single file you!"

"Stick together," Joe said softly. "I've got a funny feeling about them two jerks..."

"**A**LL RIGHT, get moving," a voice somewhere ordered. "This coffin is taking off in ten minutes. Tell the stewardess what you want in the way of eats and drinks on the way in, and be sure you sit in the seat that has your reservation number. Come on, get moving."

Men were moving up the cleared metal ramp, pausing at the open hatchway, then ducking inside. Al led the way, followed by Henry, then Joe. Those behind pushed in gently. Two-thirds of the way up the incline each man turned to take a last look at the New York skyline. It was farewell.

Henry Prince was no exception. Then he was ducking into the plane, looking for the stewardess.

"Move as far forward as you can get," a metallic voice was repeating. There was no stewardess.

Henry jerked his head up to take in the plane's interior. There were no seats. Instead, there were literally hundreds of straps hanging from the arched ceiling of the plane.

"Snap out of it!" the metallic voice barked.

Henry jerked back to the source of the voice. The tail space of the plane was walled off by a metal wall in which was set a thick transparent

window with three round holes whose only purpose could be to insert the barrels of guns for aiming on the occupants of the plane! Behind this window was the owner of the voice erupting from the small loudspeaker attached to the ceiling above the wall.

"It's going to be a terrible hardship," the metallic voice said. "You'll all have to stand for three hours. All the way across the Atlantic. You won't be able to move around. It'll be almost as terrible as the subway, but not quite so jerky. Get moving, you!"

"Come on, Hank," Joe whispered, shoving gently.

They pressed into the wall of bodies, groping upward for a strap to cling to, other bodies pressing them still more solidly into the mass of flesh.

There was the clang of the hatch closing. A whirring noise started up, bringing a steady wind of cool air.

"The jerk back there behind the window's putting on black light glasses," Al whispered. The next instant the lights went out.

There were no port windows. Henry knew that there must be black light bathing them so that the guard could see them clearly while they could see nothing. So much the better.

"Take my hand, Hank," Joe's whisper sounded. "We'll move up a ways so's anybody who's got a line on us can't find us. Easy now."

Henry followed in the wake of the larger man as they inched so slowly they were barely moving. The plane started to move, bouncing over the concrete, its movement aiding their progress.

"This's good enough," Al grunted nearby.

Henry tried to disengage his hand from Joe's. Joe held on.

"Keep hold," he whispered.

They were in the air now, the soft roar of the twelve jet motors deepening. The mass of flesh they were a



part of moved under the action of a slow banking turn.

It wasn't bad, Henry decided.

The refreshing draft was growing colder. It was a welcome coldness as the heat from the massed bodies around him began to accumulate.

No one was talking. There was no sound except the jets. Henry's thoughts turned toward the organized mass movement of which he was now an insignificant part. These planes were leaving every two hours, each with a hundred and fifty men. Eighteen hundred men every twenty-four hours, day after day.

That fantastic superbuilding being constructed was using them all as fast as they could be brought over.

Of what use would such a building be, even to the Lotissivians? A hundred miles square, a hundred miles high! Fifty million square miles of floor space! Equivalent to one fourth the surface area of the entire world! And set in the heart of devastated Europe near where Vienna once had been.

A tearing scream shattered his thoughts. It was only a few feet away. It was followed by another, then a third, which died shudderingly into a dead silence in which even the roar of the jets seemed to retreat.

The jet roar came back, pounding into the silence, dispersing it. But in the total darkness there was no movement, no sound. Nothing but the press of unmoving bodies, the firm grip of Joe's fingers about Henry's hand.

"It's a knife in him!" a voice whispered in horror. Then the voice changed to a panic stricken-blubbering. "He's bleeding on me! Get him away! Oh God, get him away!"

There was the thud of a fist....

**H**ENRY PRINCE began to experience the full horror of utter darkness. Or rather, he began to sense

it. And from the way Joe's grip on his hand was increasing he knew that he wasn't the only one to feel it. His imagination tortured him with visions of a murderer sliding between bodies, searching for him.

Him? The screams of the dying man had come from about where he had been standing when the lights went out. Had that knife been meant for him? Joe and Al had been smart, moving to a different place after the lights went out.

Who were Joe and Al? Just a couple of laborers? Would men who had just worked at jobs requiring muscles all their lives think of the possibility of murder in the dark?

His thoughts went back to when Al and Joe had been poking fun at him. That had been a bullying sort of thing, not in keeping with their actions and attitude since then. But a harmless sort of bullying. As understandable in two coarse giants as their immediate and unreserved respect when he demonstrated his skill at handling those two subversives. It had been nothing, really. A simple lesson in mechanics. The applying of all the muscles in the body in the turning over of a wrist. The pain that engendered in the owner of the wrist started instantaneous reflex action designed to relieve the pain, so that the lifting into the air and flopping over was done entirely by the muscles of the victim.

Its remarkableness was superficial. On the surface it probably had appeared to the uninitiated eye that he had lifted a man twice his weight and flopped him over on his back by brute force.

He smiled in the darkness. The horror of skulking death was gone now. For the moment, at least. Had the murderer realized his mistake? Was he even now searching? Edging between bodies as he looked for

someone shorter than himself?

How would he find someone as short as—*him*? Henry visualized the murderer, touching one man after another, looking for a shoulder lower than others. Had there been another man as short as himself? Yes. He recalled that there had been another man in the group that was only five-feet-six or so.

The torture of claustrophobia rose to the surface of Henry's mind, driving away his calmness.

And then a light appeared forward. By standing on tiptoe Henry could make it out. It was an illuminated sign reading, "No smoking. Fasten your seat belts."

A nervous laughter was drifting through the mass of densely packed flesh like a breeze rattling dry leaves on a tree in autumn. God, Henry thought, how much warmth and comfort a little light can be to a man. He stayed on tiptoe, his eyes feasting on the light from the sign.

The touch of fingers on his shoulder was an electric alarm. His mind seemed to separate into two distinct parts, one controlling his movements, the other observing them.

He reached for and seized the fingers of the hand that had touched him. Even as he selected the middle finger of the hand and bent it with a backward twist until he felt it snap, broken, he marveled that such a plan for later identifying the man had formed in his mind without him being consciously aware of it.

As the finger broke under his pressure he let go of the hand, sensing its movement as it vanished. And already he was regretting his impulsive act. In all probability the person who had touched his shoulder was not the murderer but an innocent party. A badly needed worker would now be incapacitated for six weeks.

Oh well, Henry thought, grinning,

the man would receive forty-two thousand dollars without working then.

The roar of the jets had died unnoticed. Now a shrill screaming whine rose as the plane dropped, braking with its wings as it went in for a landing. Henry felt himself squeezed forward as the plane decelerated.

Then a bump shook the floor. A moment later the rapid bumping of the floor told of the landing. It grew less and less. It stopped. They had arrived!

Abruptly the lights went on, blindingly.

**S**OMETHING jarred against the side of the ship. There were scraping metallic sounds. The hatch swung open.

"Move out slowly," the metallic voice sounded. "Leave that body where it is. Step around it. When you get outside separate so that you're well spread out in the compound. Sit down and stay there. Get moving now. We haven't got all night."

With a shock Henry realized that it was night, here in Europe. It had been almost noon when they had left New York three hours ago.

The pressure of bodies ahead of him lessened. Joe and Al were on either side of him protectively. They ducked their heads and stepped out of the plane onto the ramp.

A landscape of fantasy met their eyes. A few miles away the widely spaced powerful lights began to merge, so that the horizon was a circle of incandescence. Above that rose a wide band of lights in a network of lines, rising tier upon tier. These lines could be nothing but the skeletal girders of the rising structure.

Half stumbling down the ramp while he gazed in awe at the fantastic panorama of man-made landscape, Henry reached the bottom and stepped onto the floor. It was of met-

al. He looked down at it and wondered how far down the actual surface of the earth was. A hundred feet? A thousand?

"Move out and separate," a voice shouted, sounding feeble in the immensity of things.

"Over toward that gate," Al whispered. "Then nobody can pass us."

Henry looked in the direction Al had indicated. It was the exit to the enclosure. He nodded his agreement. It would be the ideal spot. He could be one of the first ones interviewed, and thus give the authorities what he knew of the murder so they could be on the watch for a man with a broken finger.

He reached a spot where he would be nearest the gates and sat down facing the plane. The last of the laborers came out and down the ramp.

For fifteen minutes there was no movement except for the moving around of uniformed soldiers, American soldiers. If there were any of the Lotissivians around they weren't in evidence.

Henry had never seen one in all the five years they had been here. He had of course seen innumerable pictures of them. They were definitely human, ranging in height from three feet to over five feet, with most of them just an inch or two over the three feet. Beautifully proportioned, they were like dolls.

The gates rattled open at Henry's back. He turned his head. A dozen soldiers with heavy service automatics at their hips were flanking three civilians. Henry recognized one of them as his chief, Major Winthrop.

Winthrop looked at him as he passed. Though there had been no sign of recognition, Henry was sure the major had recognized him. Now he would know that the murder was probably connected with the subversive movement, because he knew that

Henry wouldn't have been on the plane unless suspected subversives were also on it.

The group went into the plane. A few minutes later Major Winthrop came out, flanked by two of the guards, and came back to the gate.

Workers under the directions of soldiers were now constructing a fenced-in lane from the compound to the building fifty yards away, that appeared to be the airport offices. Trucks were lumbering up loaded with already constructed sections. Welders were tacking the sections to the metal floor. Twenty minutes saw the job done.

A uniformed officer strode down the fenced-in lane to the gate from the airport building.

"You," he said, pointing to Henry. "Come with me. The rest of you stay where you are. You'll be called one at a time."

Henry rose and followed the man. Shortly he was escorted into a room where Major Winthrop and several men in civilian clothes were standing. The officer who had brought him in left, closing the door behind him.

"Hello, Henry," Major Winthrop said calmly. "Make your report quickly and completely so that there will be no delay that might cast suspicion your way with the others of the load."

"...SO," HENRY said, summing up his report, "if the murdered man is my height the knife was intended for me, and if the man with a broken finger is one of those two, Paul Granch or Harry Lark, it makes it certain."

"We aren't too interested in the murder," Major Winthrop said. "I wish you hadn't broken the man's finger. It complicates things, not to mention putting a worker out of commission for a week or two. I don't



believe you realize the full gravity of the situation, Henry."

"I think I do, sir," Henry said stiffly. "The Lotissivians will—"

"Yes, yes," the major cut in. "I know you are fully aware of *that* aspect of the situation. However, that isn't the major danger. In fact, it might be a good thing if the Lotissivians were to drop an occupation army and take over the United States. It's working very well in the other countries where it has been done, and all we are doing at present is running our government into bankruptcy in an effort to stall off the inevitable."

Henry Prince stared at the major, puzzled.

"If that isn't the thing we're trying to prevent," he said, "then you're right. I don't, as you say, realize the full gravity of the situation."

"The so-called subversives are the real focus of danger," the major said. "Do you see why?"

"They're the real threat?" Henry echoed, mystified. "But if you aren't worried about the Lotissivians taking over, how can the subversives be such a danger? All they can do is hamper recruiting of workers and get us so far behind schedule the Lotissivians will take over."

"If that were all we might even encourage them," Major Winthrop said. "But consider the overall picture."

"I don't know what you mean, Major Winthrop," Henry said. "I have considered the overall picture."

"The subversives are well organized," the major said slowly.

"I understand that, sir," Henry said.

"Who organized them?" the major shot out crisply. "Some group wanting the Lotissivians to occupy the one area they have left alone, the United States? If that were to happen, our financial structure would be dissolved

and the system of benevolent slavery they have imposed on the rest of the world would be imposed. Who would gain by that?"

"I thought it was generally believed the subversives were a group of religious fanatics who think the Lotissivians are the hosts of the Lord, here to save mankind," Henry said doubtfully. "Surely there can't be any other explanation!"

The major shook his head. "I didn't think you were that naive," he said. "You know a little of the number of the subversives. You know something of their ways of operating. That attempt to kill you, for example. Does that strike you as being the work of a religious group?"

"Then who?" Henry asked, a little of his exasperation creeping into his voice.

"We don't know," Major Winthrop said gravely. "But everything points toward it being some group intent on defying the Lotissivians themselves!"

"What?" Henry said. "But that's absurd. It would be like a—a mosquito going lion hunting. They have several times the population of the Earth in spaceships circling the planet. They're invincible. Their science is as far beyond ours as ours is against that of the Seventeenth Century."

"Yes, yes," the major said. "It seems absurd. We would think it absurd. But there are two things that keep us from dismissing it as an absurdity. One, there is evidence of tremendous intelligence behind the subversives. Two, the Lotissivians seem afraid of something."

"Afraid?" Henry exclaimed. "Afraid when they stopped our world war cold in twenty-four hours, defeating the combined armed forces of both sides? Afraid when they occupy every portion of the globe with armies greater in numbers than the total population of the world, and could occupy the

United States tomorrow as easily? And they have an estimated million and a quarter space battleships circling the Earth, each one able to lay waste to a thousand square miles by a flick of a Lotissivian's wrist, and come back and do it again to another thousand square miles, all day long?"

"Then why," the major said, emphasizing each word, "*don't* they occupy the United States? Why this giant building in the middle of what is left of Europe? *Why the necessity of having it completed by a certain date?* We can't answer any of those questions. But we're reasonably certain of two things. The Lotissivians, in spite of their might, are afraid to occupy the United States; and the subversives are what they *are* afraid of!"

"I—I can't see it," Henry said. "I can't imagine what could possibly be a threat to them. Especially, anything originating on Earth. If there were another galactic horde as big as theirs within shooting distance of the Earth..."

"We don't know," Major Winthrop said. We want to find out if we can. Therefore we're going to let this murder slide. We'll go through with our investigation of it, but make no arrests. And your orders are to try to make friends with Paul Granch and Harry Lark, and carry on in such a way that if they have any contacts you can get in touch with you then become a subversive yourself."

"Yes, sir," Henry said.

"One more thing," the major said, "before you go back to the compound. I won't contact you again. If you make progress I'll see that you get cooperation. If you get orders to do some sabotage, or any other kind of orders, write them down and mail them to C.P.O.XXX. We'll see to it that you're a success as a traitor."

He smiled and held out his hand.

"**W**HY'D THEY take so long with you?" Joe said to Henry out of the corner of his mouth an hour later as the group was being led across the steel floor toward a distant line of portable shacks.

"They asked me to tell them all I remembered hearing when the guy was knifed," Henry said, shrugging indifferently. "So I told them."

"You tell them about those two punks?"

"Why should I?" Henry said.

"Yeah," Joe muttered. "That's right. But we're going to have trouble with them."

"Maybe," Henry said. He looked around and saw that the two, Paul and Harry, weren't far behind. "What do you say we drop back and join them?"

Paul and Harry were pale and tight lipped as the three dropped into step beside them.

"See what I told you?" Henry said. "Where's the radio-activity? Aren't you glad you didn't back out now?"

"So what?" Paul Granch said nervously.

"So I was thinking the five of us might be better off sticking together," Henry said blandly. "With a murderer in the crowd he won't have a chance to knife any of us in the back if we stick together."

Henry turned his gaze to Harry Lark.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked.

His eyes dropped to where Harry's hand was hidden in a pocket.

"Nothing!" Harry said. "Why don't you three punks scram? You ain't welcome here."

"Yeah?" Henry said. "Want a knife in your back like that other guy?"

"I suppose you're the one who knifed him?" Harry said.

"Shut up, Harry," Paul said.

"What's the matter with your hand,

Harry?" Al asked innocently. "The way you hold it in your pocket looks funny, like it was hurt."

"Why don't you go peddle your papers before you get a knife in *your* back?" Harry gritted.

"My, my," Al said. "You don't learn your lessons very well, do you Harry?" He reached out quickly and tapped Harry's hand.

Harry cursed in a low voice thick with pain.

"Broken!" Al muttered, surprised. He looked at Henry, his eyes wide and innocent. "Now I wonder who in this crowd knows how to break a finger quick and neat-like..."

"Why, Al!" Henry said. "I was with you and Joe all the time on the plane."

"Names, please, gentlemen?"

It was a pleasant female voice. The line had stopped. The five men stared at the girl, startled. Joe recovered first.

"Mine's Joe," he said. "What's yours, honey?"

"That's it," the girl said. "Honey. Although some people prefer to call me sugar."

"No foolin'?" Joe said. "How's about a date my first day off from work, Honey?"

"Tell you what I'll do, Joe," Honey said, her tones intimate and promising, "I'll put you on my waiting list, and when your turn comes up I'll let you know."

"Waiting list?" Joe said, dismayed. He glanced doubtfully at the ledger book in her hands.

"Of course, Joe," she said. "Do you think there is *any* man in this line so discourteous as to neglect to ask me for a date?"

Her laughter was tinkling sleigh-bells, infectious.

Henry had been watching her quietly, taking in the almost golden richness of her hair under the pert hat,

the saucy good nature that molded her features, the rich curves of her body that not even the sexless cut of her uniform could quite conceal.

Unconsciously he had stepped back so that the other four would be taken care of ahead of him.

"Your name?" she asked.

"Henry Prince," he said.

"Hen-ry... Prince," she wrote. Then she looked up at him expectantly while Joe, Al, Paul, and Harry waited.

Henry hesitated. He knew she was the nicest thing he had ever seen. He wanted desperately to get acquainted with her. But some instinct warned him that if he asked her for a date now she would strike him off as just another nice uninteresting male.

"Well?" Honey said sweetly.

"Oh, you're asking me for a date?"

Henry said blandly. "I'm sorry, but with you tying up all the other males, I'll have to leave my free time open for other girls."

Was that a brief flash of disappointment he saw in her eyes? He couldn't be sure. But he had a sudden feeling that she was ready to put him at the top of her "list" right there.

"Your name?" she was saying to the next man....

**T**HE NEXT morning after breakfast they were informed that the first day would be spent in a tour of the entire project.

By an adroit maneuver Paul and Harry managed to escape the company of Joe, Al, and Henry into a different group.

"Let them go for today," Henry said. "I want to talk with you two without them along anyway."

Shortly they were speeding along the metal floor of the fabricated world they were now living in, in a sight-seeing bus with transparent top. A skinny man standing at the front of the bus beside the driver spoke



through a microphone into a loud-speaker.

He said, "This level we are on is the eight hundred foot level, the lowest still open. In most other areas the construction has already gone up to the nine hundred foot level, and I understand that in about three weeks this area will be cleared for construction.

"The skeletal structure goes up four stories at a time, each story being twenty-five feet, and each area of construction being a mile square. Back home in the States, building a structure a hundred feet high covering a square mile of ground would be considered a major project. Here we have five thousand such separate projects in operation all the time. One hundred and eleven thousand of them have been completed. The schedule on each for a full crew is three months and eight days.

"The completed structure will have three hundred million tons of high tensile alumoy metal girders and plates in it, which, as you all know, is Russia's share in this work. There will be half a million miles of vertical elevator shafts carrying two million elevators, plus another half-million miles of horizontal shafts carrying two million cars.

"That should give you a rough idea of the size of the building you're going to be working on for the next two years..."

While the guide was talking, Henry, Joe, and Al had their heads together, talking in low voices.

"I've been wanting to find out how and why you broke Harry's finger," Al said impatiently.

"When we heard that scream of the man who was knifed," Henry exclaimed, "I figured there might be a possibility of the killer learning it wasn't the right man. I knew he couldn't see, but only feel. Most of the men are six feet tall and I'm six

inches shorter than most of them, so I figured if he continued looking for me sooner or later I would feel a hand touch my head or shoulder. So I stood on my toes to make myself taller, and waited. The minute I felt a hand touch my shoulder I grabbed it and broke a finger so I could know later who it was."

"Then Harry killed that fellow," Joe growled. "Did you tell them that when they had you in on the carpet?"

"It wouldn't be enough proof to convict a man," Henry hedged.

"You should have told about it anyway," Al said. "Those two know that you know who the killer is. They'll be after you all the more now. Sooner or later they'll get you."

"I wonder if they really did work for an organized group that was trying to scare off recruits for this job over here," Joe said. "If they were, we kind of upset their plans by making them sign up."

"Maybe," Henry said. "I think though that if the thing's that organized they probably have men right here trying all the time to sabotage construction. So Paul and Harry will go into that work, now that they're stuck here for two years the same way we are. I was thinking maybe by sticking close to them we might uncover the whole setup and really get something that will stick."

"Are you," Al asked dryly, "an undercover agent for the government, Hank? By any chance?"

"Oh sure," Henry grinned. "I signed up for this job just to get an extra thousand a day to augment my salary."

He studied the two men sharply, deciding from their grins at his remark that they were dismissing the possibility of him being a government agent from their thoughts.

"What I was thinking," Joe said seriously, "is that maybe they'll pass

on the job of eliminating you—and maybe me and Al—to others in their organization. That way we wouldn't know what to guard against."

"Maybe," Henry admitted. "It's probably too late to do anything about that. But listen to my idea and see what you think of it. The subversives are probably plenty anxious to get recruits. And they probably pay good, too. What do you think of the idea of playing along with them, coming right out to Paul and Harry with a proposition to hook up with their gang, then breaking it up when we know where to do the breaking?"

"You talk awfully big," Joe said.

"How come you're still alive at—how old are you, Hank?" Al asked. "Twenty-four or so?"

Henry grinned and turned his head toward the window of the bus, not pressing the point. He knew he would get an answer only after the two men had talked it over between themselves, and that nothing more he could say at present would help.

"**T**HINK I'll try my luck with Honey once more," Joe said, standing up and stretching casually.

Henry glanced briefly at him and nodded with apparent disinterest. Joe and Al had been whispering together off and on. He knew they had been discussing his proposition. This could have something to do with that, or it could be just what it seemed.

Paul and Harry, sitting together within earshot, seemed not to have been listening.

Joe walked down the aisle between the rows of cots toward the exit. When the door closed on him, Paul rose and started out. Instantly Al, who had seemed half asleep, rose to his feet and caught up with him.

"Go back and sit down," he said. "You ain't going anywhere."

He stood there belligerently until

Paul had returned to his cot, then went slowly back to Henry.

"Imagine," he drawled. "Paul doesn't even want Joe to make time with a good-looking girl."

Outside, Joe went to a building that had been pointed out as the women's dormitory. He hesitated briefly, then entered, finding himself in a hall that served as lobby. He felt more at ease when he saw here and there a man sitting with a girl, talking. He crossed the lobby to the desk.

"Yes?" the capable-looking woman behind the counter asked.

"I want to speak to Honey," Joe said uncomfortably. "I don't know her last name. She's the one who took our names yesterday."

"You must mean Honey Childs," the woman said. "I'll ring her room and ask her if she'll see you. What's your name?"

A moment later the woman looked up from the phone with an apologetic expression on her face.

"I'm very sorry," she said, "but Honey has a headache and can't come down."

"Wait a minute," Joe said hastily. "Don't hang up yet. Tell her I'm not trying to date her. I've got to talk to her about something very important."

The woman hesitated, then repeated Joe's words into the phone. She hung up and came to the counter.

"Sit over there," she said, pointing to a chair. "She'll be down in a moment."

Joe smiled his thanks and went over and sat down. It was nearly ten minutes before Honey appeared. Joe felt an inner thrill as her eyes lit up with recognition. She came over and sat down in a chair facing him.

"I'm sorry, Joe," she said. "I didn't know who it was, and so many of the new recruits try to date me that it gets monotonous, though I try to keep remembering that each one is a sin-

cere human being."

"Yeah," Joe said, finding his tongue thick and clumsy. "That's all right. I wouldn't have bothered you for myself."

"Then it's Henry Prince?" she said eagerly.

"Well..." Joe hesitated. Suddenly he leaned forward. "I won't beat around the bush. I don't know how well acquainted you are around here, but I've got to talk to somebody in charge of things. The big boss, or something. It's very important. I don't want to tell you what it's about, because I don't want you in any danger."

"Danger?" Honey Childs said. "What are you talking about?" She studied Joe closely, then seemed to make up her mind. "All right, Joe," she said, "I won't ask any questions."

She stood up and went over to a row of phone booths. On her way back she stopped at the desk and whispered with the woman there. Joe saw the woman nod and glance over at him. Then Honey came back and sat down.

"There are small cars here for couples to go riding in," she said. "In a minute we'll go out just like we were going riding together, which we'll actually do. I'll do the driving and—" she smiled impudently—"no monkey business."

"Who, me?" Joe said.

Honey looked at him, then impulsively reached out and placed her hand over his.

"Or at least not much monkey business," she added, jerking back as she saw the happy look in his eyes.

**S**HE DROVE through the city of housing quarters, her attention concentrated on the way ahead, while Joe sat beside her, his mission all but forgotten in the spell of her presence.

The housing section was soon left

behind. Ahead stretched miles of almost mathematically flat expanse vanishing into the horizon of overhead lighting in the distance.

In fifteen minutes a high cliff of exposed girders loomed ahead. Honey didn't slow down. At the last moment an opening appeared through the lights. Then the car was speeding through a long tunnel.

Suddenly she braked sharply, turning into what appeared to be a two-car garage, and stopping. She honked the horn. Joe felt himself sink deeper into the seat under the force of upward acceleration, and realized that they were on an elevator.

When it came to a stop Honey started the car again.

"You're awfully quiet," she said, flashing him a smile. "I thought I was going to have to fight you off when we were in the elevator, and you didn't even look at me."

"I thought of it," Joe confessed. "But you're too high class for me. You're more Henry's type. I'm just a common lug."

Honey drove in silence, a twisted smile on her red velvet lips. Joe looked out the window at the tunnel walls speeding by.

"Yeah," Honey said, aping his melancholy. "I guess you're right. I'm more Henry's type. High class."

Joe frowned at her suspiciously but she stared straight ahead at the roadway. When he turned his eyes back to the road she slowly exhaled the breath she had been holding.

Numbers appeared on the roadway ahead. Honey slowed the car, turned into another tunnel, pulled over to the outer lane and stopped the car beside a platform.

"They're waiting for you," she said quietly.

Joe opened the door and started to get out. Suddenly he turned and faced her.

"Honey," he said.

"Yes?"

"Uh," he said uncomfortably, "thanks for helping me this way." He backed out of the door.

"Don't mention it," Honey said, her eyes flashing in sudden anger.

"Now I wonder what I did to make her mad?" Joe muttered as he hurried across the platform.

"JOSEPH WRIGHT?" the man said. "I'm Major Winthrop. Miss Childs said you had something very important to report."

"Yes, sir," Joe said. "Al and I talked it over and decided we'd better let somebody know. It's about Henry's idea. He wants to get in with the fellows trying to sabotage operations."

"I'm glad you decided to report it," the major said. "That's very serious. He could be shot for trying to do a thing like that."

"That's not it, exactly," Joe said. "He thinks we could get in with them and learn all about them, and maybe get a fat reward for breaking the whole thing up."

"What did you say his name was?" Major Winthrop asked sharply.

"Henry Prince," Joe said uncomfortably. "This won't get him in trouble? He's not a traitor. He's very patriotic."

"Who are these men he wants to get in with?" the major asked.

"I'd rather not say just now, sir," Joe said. "Henry wouldn't like that. He thinks we should handle it alone."

"Does it have anything to do with that murder on the plane?" the major asked.

"It might," Joe hedged.

Major Winthrop appeared to be thinking. He listened while Joe continued a halting explanation of what they were planning to do.

"Might be a good idea," the major

said finally. "I'm glad you came to me, though. Now here's what I want you to do, you and your friend Al. I want you to keep me informed of your activities. Don't tell Henry Prince about this though. Let him keep thinking you're playing along with his plans."

"But you'll need cooperation from us sometimes, especially if you make a definite contact and get assignments to do any dirty work. We could stand a little sabotage if the end result is getting at the root of the whole business. So go along with Prince, and if at any time something comes up that we should know about so your plans won't get you involved in trouble, write a brief note and address it simply to C.P.O.XXX. Drop it in a mailbox. We'll get it in a few hours."

"Yes sir," Joe said. "C.P.O.XXX. What does that triple X stand for?"

"That's just an identifying set of letters," the major said. He smiled disarmingly and shook hands with Joe in dismissal.

Back in the car Joe relaxed with a happy sigh.

"Everything all right?" Honey asked, turning the car.

"Better than I expected," Joe said.

"What about your friends?" Honey said. "Won't they suspect something?"

"I—I told them I was going to try to date you," Joe said.

"Well," Honey said, her eyes straight ahead. "I guess you can tell them you did without telling a lie. We went for a ride, didn't we? Still—" she frowned in apparent study of the problem—"they might not believe you. Of course, you could kiss me... That would leave some lipstick on you..."

"Yeah," Joe said. "I could sort of forget I had it on. Then I could pretend to be surprised when they saw it on me. But would you—I mean, it would be a lot to ask you to do..."



Honey stopped the car, leaving the motor running. Then she turned to Joe.

"I—I'm willing, Joe," she said. She lifted her head and closed her eyes.

Joe looked at her pale inviting features for an instant, then his arms crept about her slim waist and he kissed her. He drew her closer, feeling her yield. Then suddenly he drew away from her.

"What about Hank?" he said. "This'll queer things between you and him."

"Oh forget about Hank," Honey said sharply.

Her expression softened, a dreamy, almost hypnotic, quality creeping into her eyes. Joe leaned forward slowly, watching her eyes close in expectation, feeling her lips meet his, her body curve under the pressure of his embrace.

"Joe..." she said drowsily.

"Yeah, Honey," Joe murmured.

"What was that all about that you came here to see the major for?"

"I'd better not tell you," he said. "It would be too dangerous for you to know anything."

"You mean you don't trust me?" she asked, leaning back and looking at him with round eyes.

"No, of course I don't mean that," he said gently. "I mean it would be dangerous for you. It has to do with a subversive group trying to sabotage construction that we're going to try to uncover."

"But I might just as well know," Honey said. "If they know you're out to get them they'll know I was with you and I'll be in danger anyway."

"Gee," Joe said, straightening. "I never thought of that! Here I've been stupid enough to place you in danger, and that's the last thing I wanted to do."

"Well it's too late to be sorry about it," Honey said. "I might as well

know everything. Then I can recognize danger when I see it, and maybe even be able to help out."

She pushed Joe away from her and got behind the wheel.

"I know a good place to park while we talk," she said, starting the car. "It's called Lovers' Leap...."

HENRY PRINCE watched Joe through slitted eyes, pretending to be asleep. He felt Joe's eyes on him briefly, passing to Al's cot. He saw Joe touch Al's foot, heard the deep breathing of the sleeping man stop abruptly, saw Joe's expressionless nod. He didn't move when Joe climbed into the cot next to his. After that he lay awake for a long time....

A bell was clanging jarringly. Everybody was stirring. Henry sat up. Al was already sitting at the foot of his cot getting dressed. Joe groaned protestingly and sat up.

"What's that on your face, Joe?" Al asked.

Henry looked. It was red, smeared almost lavishly. Lipstick. He went cold inside. When he tried to match Al's delighted laughter his grin was sickly. Joe was trying to wipe it off.

"I forgot it might show," Joe was saying disgustedly.

"Well, congratulations, Joe," Henry said, shrugging off the feeling of loss. "She's a nice girl."

"Ah, she's just a dame," Joe said, but his indifference was less than skin deep.

They were dressing now.

"We went for a ride," Joe went on. "Drove clear over to the edge where we could look down on the Danube. The river's packed with big cargo boats. Bringing girders and plates from Russia, I guess. They looked small from nine hundred feet up."

"Where'd you get the car?" Al asked.

"Oh, she got it," Joe said.

"See you in the washroom," Henry said, picking up his travel case and towel, and hurrying away without waiting for an answer.

A few moments later Joe and Al joined him.

"About that scheme of yours," Al said, "we've decided to play along. Make it a partnership. Share the risk and share equally on any reward."

"It's a deal," Henry said. "Now we've got to corner Paul and Harry and put it up to them. Convince them we want to tie in with them."

"Right," Al said.

But it seemed the opportunity wouldn't come soon. Paul and Harry managed to eat at another table. They ate hurriedly and slipped out during a moment when none of the three was watching.

"Guess it'll have to be tonight," Joe grumbled.

The three finished their breakfast glumly, then rose and went to the exit.

"Your names?" a man just outside the door said. They told him and he looked over a list, took three cards from a small file box and handed them over. "Give these to a man standing by a truck with the number three painted on its side. The truck'll take you where you're supposed to work."

Paul and Harry were standing beside the truck. Their faces darkened when they saw them approach.

"Looks like we're going to be working in the same spot," Joe said to them, grinning.

"Come here, you two," Al said inaudibly. "We want to make a deal with you."

Paul and Harry's eyes widened in surprise. They followed the three to a spot where they wouldn't be overheard.

"What's the deal?" Harry asked.

"You been wondering why Hank didn't tip off the authorities about

you two punks?" Al said. "He had a reason. We had a reason. We ain't satisfied with what we'll have left of the thousand a day after taxes. We knew you must be hooked up with some organization that has plenty of dough, because sabotage don't come cheap. We want in on it."

Paul and Harry looked at each other, their expressions unreadable.

"You got us wrong," Paul said stiffly. "We ain't hooked up with nobody in anything like that."

"Suit yourself," Al shrugged. "Too bad you ain't. It would fix things up nice between us. We could be pals, instead of each of us wondering what accident was going to happen next that might be worse than a busted finger. In fact, I got a hunch something might happen right today. People who know too much to live, generally don't—very long."

"Suppose we did have—connections," Harry said, nursing his broken finger, now in a plaster cast. "Just supposing, don't you think it would be much easier just to have you three meet with a fatal accident than let you live with what you think you know?"

"Not the way I see it," Al said. "I think they need men. Good men. Not bungling punks. I dare you to pass the word along to them that we want to hook up. They'd probably get rid of you two before the day's out and contact us themselves."

"Come on," Henry said. "We're wasting our time. Who'd be dumb enough to trust anything to these two?"

"Yeah," Joe growled. "Take a last look at them, because they probably won't be alive, come lunch time."

Joe, Al, and Henry grinned sinistinely and turned their backs, going to the truck. After they were in they looked over to see what Paul and Harry were doing. They were no

place in sight at the moment.

"What the—where could they have run to?" Al said.

"Maybe their contact is around close," Henry said. "It could be they've gone to ask about us. If that's so, we'll be hearing about it quick, because Paul and Harry won't like the idea of dying before lunch time." They chuckled softly, the chuckle of men who know they themselves might not be alive much longer.

**T**HE TRUCK began to fill with men. At the last moment before starting, Paul and Harry climbed on.

"It's a truce for the present," Paul mumbled near Henry's ear. "I'm not saying anything, but maybe, just maybe, you'll get something definite that'll fix things between all of us."

"Okay, a truce," Henry said. "But you don't mind if we don't trust you just yet, do you?"

Paul went on toward the front of the truck with Harry. Henry told his companions what Paul had said.

"Looks like he meant someone will contact us," Al said. "They'd have to. We can't afford to take any say-so from them two. Wonder who it will be?"

"Maybe nobody," Henry said. "They might not chance letting us see them. My guess is it will be a note for us to be at a certain place tonight. Then it will depend on whether they need us if we get the works or a proposition."

The truck started moving. Other trucks were in the line ahead and behind, going toward the hundred-foot wall that hid the construction work they were being taken to.

Shortly the string of trucks entered a tunnel. After a short distance they turned onto an area that held ten trucks at once. As the last truck pulled into position the whole thing began to rise. It was an elevator.

Henry reached into his pocket for a cigarette, his eyes looking downward toward his knees absently. Suddenly a small folded piece of paper seemed to materialize a few inches above his lap, poise there for a second, then drop. He glanced up quickly, looking around. No one was paying any attention to him.

He thought, "Of course it was a trick of my eyes. Someone threw it."

He picked it up and unfolded it casually. Joe and Al noticed it and leaned over to read it with him. It read:

*Mr. Prince: You and your two companions will be at the rear of the building in which you sleep at precisely ten-thirty this evening and stand at least ten feet away from the wall of the building in plain sight.*

"Where'd that come from?" Joe asked.

"I don't know," Henry said. "It seemed to materialize right in front of me."

"I don't see how," Joe said uneasily. "I've had my eyes on those two, and they haven't written anything. They couldn't write like that, anyway."

"No, they couldn't," Henry admitted. "This was written by someone who has made an art of penmanship. It was written carefully at a desk, not scribbled in someone's lap on a moving truck."

"Anyway this is it," Al said. "Tonight we get knocked off or get a new job."

The trucks were moving again. They didn't go far, parking with their noses against a platform which stretched out a hundred yards, dotted with all types of benches and machines.

They were ordered to line up and a man with a pile of cards started calling off their names. As each man called stepped forward he was told

where to go in a definite tone.

Henry found himself at a bench on which lay several thick pieces of metal with beveled edges, and a device on small wheels which he knew must be some type of machine welder.

He occupied his time studying the machine without touching it, figuring out its probable behavior. After a while an instructor came around and showed him how to operate it, giving him a booklet of instructions. From the booklet he learned that all girders and plates were to be welded rather than riveted, and that his future job would be welding joints.

**"T**HINK I'll write the folks back home," Joe said. "I'll see you guys at supper."

"I'll join you," Henry said quickly. "I've got to drop a line to a friend."

Joe hesitated, then fell in beside Henry, who smiled slightly to himself, having guessed that Major Winthrop had probably instructed Joe to keep making reports to him through the XXX address. It was a wise precaution, because at any time it might become impossible for Henry to make them. Then Joe's report would suffice.

Fifteen minutes later they dropped their envelopes in the mailbox in the reading room, each being casually careful that the address on the envelope didn't show.

"Well," Joe said, glancing at his watch, "six-thirty. Four more hours."

"Hope they have something good to eat," Henry said.

"Yeah," Joe grunted. "Condemned men..."

At twenty after ten Joe, Al, and Henry casually pushed back from the table where they had been playing three-handed pinocle and strolled toward the door. Paul and Harry, over in one corner of the room, followed

them with their eyes.

Outside the building the overhead lights made every square foot of the flat metal terrain light as day. The three stood idly in front of the building talking small talk, then slowly strolled to the space between their building and the next.

At ten-twenty-nine they reached the rear of the building and paused ten feet out from it, casually half turning their backs to one another so that they could command a view in all directions, even glancing upward into the clear sky to be sure there was nothing that could drop on them from above.

"I see you obeyed orders," a voice said.

They whirled in the direction of the voice. Standing among them was a figure shaped vaguely like a man. There had been no way he could have approached without being seen, yet he was there!

"What the—" Joe gasped.

"Surprised?" the figure said mildly. "I don't blame you. I always enjoy the expression on the face of a newcomer to our ranks. You wonder how I got here? I materialized!" The figure vanished for a moment, then appeared again. "See?" it said calmly. "Now stay close together so that if anyone's looking they won't notice me. My shape is rather—ah—unusual. It would attract attention."

"It isn't your shape so much," Joe said. "It's your face. You look like the devil. Literally."

"Thank you, thank you," it said. "But my shape is as normal to me as yours is to you. In my race of humans we run to points instead of curves. Pointed ears, pointed chin." The voice changed abruptly, becoming business-like. "I understand you wish to join with those of your countrymen who are working to—ah, shall



we say further the Cause?"

"After seeing you, I wonder," Joe said. "You make me think of stories of people selling their souls to the devil."

"All superstition has a basis in fact," the being said, "including that one. However, we aren't in league with the mythical being called the devil. We are a perfectly legitimate offshoot of the human race, just as real as you."

"Just what is this Cause?" Henry spoke up. "I thought it was just some underground organization headed by a group with plenty of money and a desire to try either to drive the Lotissivians away or make them drop an occupation force into the U.S. After seeing you I don't know what to think."

"I'll explain," the being said crisply. "You see, we were getting along very nicely before the Lotissivians arrived. If they stay it will complicate things considerably. They are a uniplanar civilization just like your own, though much more advanced. Hyper-blind-mutes, and even to a large extent hyper-deaf."

"They've conquered your civilization, but not ours. We alone can fight them successfully, because their weapons can't touch us."

"But I've stayed here too long. I came only to convince you that there is something to work for. You will be amply rewarded, and I might add, not at the expense of selling your souls. From time to time you will receive specific orders, and we will expect them carried out to the letter. Here." He handed each of them a small coin-shaped object. "When you wish to summon me or one of my fellow beings, hold this in your hand. The warmth of your hand will activate it."

Suddenly the being was not there.

"NOT AT the expense of selling our souls," Al muttered. "I wish I had gone to church more often."

The being appeared again suddenly.

"Will you please drop your *charrymns* in your pockets," it said impatiently. It waited while they did so in guilty haste. "Thank you," it said, and was gone.

"I wonder if the thing can hear us when it isn't here," Joe muttered uneasily.

"I don't think so," Henry said. "Otherwise why would we need these charms, as it called these things it gave us?"

"Well," Joe said. "Looks like we're in. How do we get out?"

"That is a question," Henry said dryly. "We thought all we would run into were some people that could be captured. How do you capture something that isn't human, and can vanish right before your eyes?"

"I think there are ways," Joe said. "I remember hearing about some book on black magic that tells how to capture an evil spirit. If this thing isn't a spirit, a devil, I'll eat my hat."

"I think we've gotten into something we won't get out of," Al said. "But now I can see a whole lot I would never have guessed. Assuming Heaven and Hell exist, or some counterpart of them that could accommodate what we just met, the coming of the Lotissivians would upset the whole business. But that thing certainly wasn't a spirit of any kind. It was solid. As solid as this charm in my pocket."

"That's no lie," Joe agreed. "But there's nothing to be gained by standing out here. Let's go to bed. We know how Paul and Harry got in touch with their boss now. They must have charms like ours."

The three strolled casually around

to the front of the building and entered.

"Guess I'll go in and read for a while," Joe said carelessly. "You guys go on to bed."

"O.K.," Henry said, smiling to himself. He knew Joe was going to make a report and mail it. There would be no necessity for two reports now.

He and Al went on into the sleeping room to their cots. There Henry dumped the *charrymn* out of his pocket onto the blanket and examined it without touching it.

It was the size of a half-dollar and slightly thicker, of gold or some similar metal. It appeared to have been stamped like a coin.

He leaned forward to examine the design more closely. The figure on it was of a man standing upright with arms raised outward and legs spread apart. There was fine writing around the perimeter. It was in the same fine hand as the script on the note that had appeared out of nowhere and fallen into his lap!

That note! Then it had appeared out of nowhere! That being or one of his kind had been in the truck and dropped it in his lap!

He thought of what the major had said about the Lotissivians being afraid to occupy the United States. That was understandable now. That being hadn't been a spirit or a devil, but a purely material, living being of some kind. It had come from nowhere in the space of three dimensions. It had spoken of hyper-blindness, and hyper was a prefix used to express four dimensionality. So there must be a place in some other three dimensional space connected with the ordinary one where there were large numbers of these things with pointed ears and chins.

The Lotissivians must know about them, maybe even having instruments

to see into their dimension, and this extra-spatial race must have a large concentration in the United States but nowhere else, since the Lotissivians had landed in other areas with impunity.

Henry undressed slowly, looking at the *charrymn*, finally turning it over with his thumb nail and studying the other side. He decided it must be some very delicate device disguised as a coin. Under its surface must be some complex circuit or device able to send a signal into the fourth dimension. American scientists would give much to be able to dissect that coin and discover the principle of its operation. But would the being come and snatch it from under their noses if he sent it to the major? And what would happen to him if that thing ever suspected him of being connected with the government?

Perhaps even now it was bending over Joe's shoulder, reading his report. It might do nothing, allowing him to mail it. Perhaps it could take the letter out of the mailbox through the fourth dimension!

He stretched out in bed. When Joe came in he sighed with relief and closed his eyes.

"WHAT'RE you dressing up for, Joe?" Al asked.

"Got a date," Joe said, winking broadly.

Henry turned away, hiding the bleakness that came to his face. He wished now that he had asked Honey Childs for a date that first day. She might have accepted. Now it was too late. He couldn't very well try to horn in on Joe's girl.

Joe departed, but was back in a few moments.

"Forgot something," he said.

He cautiously slipped the *charrymn* out of his work clothes into the pocket of his suit and left again.

And shortly he was seated beside Honey in a car once more, speeding toward the now familiar tube into the section where he had gone with her on that other ride, and in which he had been working during the four days since then.

"We're in," Joe said. "I don't think I like it, but we're in. We met one of the bosses of the underground, and is it an underground! In more than one sense of the word."

"Save it, Joe," Honey said. "Wait until we're parked."

"This won't wait," Joe said, slipping his arm around her and cupping her chin in his huge hand.

Her lips yielded to his for a long moment. She pulled away.

"Darn you, Joe," she said. "Now I've lost the white line."

"To the left, I think, Honey."

Honey found the guideline again and stopped the car.

"Take your kiss back," she said, "and save it until we reach Lovers' Leap."

Joe was very sober when the car started again. Honey glanced at him from time to time, studying him. She turned the car onto the elevator and honked the horn.

"Why so sober, Joe?" she asked.

"I was just thinking," Joe said. "You're a high class girl. Educated. Rich parents. I'm nothing. Just a punk. I guess I've sort of taken advantage of you, your loneliness. When we get back to the states it wouldn't be any good. I wouldn't know how to act. Even this suit I have on feels uncomfortable."

"I'll tell you something, Joe," Honey said softly. "I was just kidding you. I'm from southern Illinois, a small town. My dad's a grocer. I—I always wanted to fall in love with a big bruiser with the heart of a baby. I—I sort of guess maybe I have."

"Then it was me all the time, and

not Henry?" Joe asked, his voice choked.

"Since the first," Honey said. "I wouldn't have dated him if he'd asked. I guess I shouldn't say it, but I kept hoping you would try again."

"Gee," Joe said. He reached out a huge paw and patted her clumsily on the cheek.

They became aware at the same time that the elevator had stopped some time before, looked at each other, laughing in embarrassment.

HONEY started the car, driving in silence until she stopped at the spot where they had parked that first night.

"Now," she said. "Tell me all about what happened."

She settled in his arms while he talked. When he told about the being who had suddenly appeared she pulled away, her eyes wide in the gloom.

"Describe him," she said queerly. "Every detail that you can remember."

She drew in her breath sharply when he told about the coin.

"A charm?" she asked. "Are you sure he called it that?"

"It sounded something like that," Joe said, "but now that you mention it, maybe he pronounced it funny. He put an extra sound in it, kind of stretching out the R."

"Like *charrymn*?" Honey asked.

"Yeah!" Joe said. "That's the way he said it. I've got it with me but I'm afraid to take it out of my pocket. Holding it in your hand sets up some kind of signal that makes the guy with the pointed ears appear."

"Oh let's not talk about it any more," Honey said huskily, lifting her face and veiling her eyes dreamily with olive lids....

Three hours later he entered the darkened hall where one hundred and forty-nine men lay sleeping. He was whistling under his breath. When he

sat down at the end of his cot the creaking awakened Henry.

Henry opened his eyes and watched Joe without moving. He saw him take off his coat and feel in a pocket. The softly whistled melody stopped abruptly. Joe's hands searched pocket after pocket swiftly. Then Joe cursed softly, dressing again hurriedly.

He was gone a half hour. When he returned he undressed again, and stretched out on his cot with a deep sigh.

Henry lay wide awake. From Joe's actions it was obvious he had lost the coin-shaped device. Henry wondered how he had lost it, what would come of it. Had the thing been stolen from Joe's pocket? Or had it merely slipped out, so that someone would find it and pick it up? If that happened, whoever found it would be in for a distinct shock.

Or had Honey taken it? It was fairly certain that it was she who had taken Joe to Major Winthrop. It was likely she had coaxed Joe to take her into his confidence. A girl like her could have just about anyone she wanted, so why should she settle for Joe? Was there some ulterior reason? Henry pondered this possibility. She certainly wasn't connected with any secret government organization or he would have been informed of the fact—or would he? Why would she steal the coin?

**“WHAT'S** the matter with you, Joe?” Al asked good naturedly. “Did Honey give you the brushoff last night?”

Joe, lacing his shoes, shook his head but didn't look up.

“Something's eatin' you,” Al said.

“So what?” Joe growled. “Shut up and mind your own business.”

Al took a quick step toward Joe and gave him a rabbit punch that carried him off the bed face down on

the floor. The room became suddenly hushed.

Joe rose in a half crouch.

“Al's in the right, Joe,” Henry said softly. “Tell us what's wrong or I'll take you apart myself.”

Joe switched his glare from Al to Henry, then the mad light in his eyes died down.

“I guess you're right,” he mumbled. “Come on. Let's go wash up and I'll tell you.”

He stood up and casually put his hands in his pockets. A ludicrous expression appeared on his features. It vanished quickly, leaving his face calm. But his eyes were shrewd and thoughtful.

“Last night I put that coin in my coat pocket when I went out,” he said when they were in the washroom. “When I got back it was gone. I thought I lost it. I looked in every pocket I own. It wasn't in any of them. Now, this morning, it's in my work trousers!”

“Is it the same one?” Henry asked.

Joe took his handkerchief and used it to bring the charrymn out of his pocket. They examined it. So far as they could tell it was the same.

“The only explanation is that you were mistaken,” Al said. “How could it get lost and then show up in your pocket?”

“I wonder,” Henry said thoughtfully. “Suppose he lost it and someone found it. They'd hold it in their hand and look at it. That whatever-it-is would appear, realize the guy wasn't the one who was supposed to have it, maybe take it away from him while he stood there with his mouth open wondering what it was all about, and return it to Joe.”

“Yes, that must be the way it happened,” Joe said eagerly. “Sure. Why didn't I think of it.”

They went to the dining room. There was an excited buzzing of con-



versation around the tables. When they sat down they learned what it was about.

"Did you hear about the monster they found outside this morning?" someone asked them. Taking their blank looks as an answer he went on, "Dead. Right in the middle of the street. It's the size of a human being and shaped a lot like one, but it has long ears pointed at the top, a chin that comes to a sharp point, and a bright red skin."

"Dead?" Henry said. "What killed it?"

"I didn't hear," the man said. "I went outside to look, but they'd already taken the thing away."

Henry Joe and Al looked at each other uneasily.

"It could be connected with your losing that charm," Al mumbled.

"They aren't called charms," Joe said. "They're called *charrymns*."

"Where'd you learn that?" Henry asked sharply.

"Honey," Joe said. Then he looked puzzled. "But how did she know?" He shrugged. "I guess she didn't."

"You mean you've been telling her all about this, you dumb fool?" Al asked angrily. "Good grief Joe, how stupid can you get?"

Joe flushed at having given himself away. This was something he hadn't told Al.

"Did you show her the charrymn?" Henry broke in.

"No," Joe said. "She didn't ask to see it."

"Then she knew what it looked like," Al said. "That dame's too mixed up in this. I'll bet she stole it out of your pocket, Joe."

Something at the front of the dining room was attracting everyone's attention. Henry Joe and Al looked to see what it was. There were four men in M. P. uniforms. They were coming toward them, glancing briefly at each face as though looking for someone.

"I've got a hunch," Henry said quickly. "Quick, Joe, give me that charrymn."

The four M. P.'s were now coming toward them purposefully. They stopped beside Joe.

"You the one who was out with Miss Childs last night?" one of them asked.

"Yeah," Joe said. "Is anything wrong?"

"Come with us," the M. P. said.

HENRY looked at the grim expressions on the M. P.'s faces, saw the troubled uneasiness of Joe's manner. He wondered if Joe had told everything.

"Am I under arrest or something?" Joe asked.

"We have orders to bring you in," the spokesman for the M. P.'s said. "Whether they lock you up or just question you makes no difference. Are you coming peaceably?"

Joe nodded.

Henry and Al watched him depart with the officers.

"That was a lucky hunch of yours to take his charrymn," Al said. "Say! You know, that's the way that fellow pronounced it. I wonder how Honey knew that. She doesn't seem the type that would be tied in with those things with pointed ears."

"I have another hunch," Henry said. "They asked Joe if he was the one who was out with Honey last night. They took him in for questioning. That adds up to Honey Childs having disappeared!"

"What!" Al exclaimed. "Say, you may be right at that. If she swiped that thing from Joe and got to monkeying with it, and old Pointed Ears appeared, he might have taken her with him to shut her up."

"The only thing I can't figure," Henry said, "is that dead one. Honey couldn't have killed one of those fellows."

"Maybe there was more than one of them," Al said. "They must have kidnapped her. Maybe that one was killed by the military police."

"I don't know," Henry said. "I keep having a strange feeling that there's even more to this than we think. If Joe comes back we can find out more about what happened. Until then we might as well forget about it."

"Yeah, let's eat our breakfast," Al said.

Joe didn't return. Al and Henry waited until the last minute to board the trucks that would take them to their work.

"Guess it must be serious," Al muttered. "Maybe we should conjure up that devil and ask him what's going on. What do you think, Hank?"

"I was just thinking the same thing," Henry said. "If Joe isn't back by tonight I'm for it, even though I hate the idea of seeing that thing again. I wonder if the dead one was the one we met?"

Henry decided by the middle of the afternoon that it was the longest day he had ever experienced. He was now a welder, working often alone. But today he wasn't alone. There was no chance to summon up the "devil", as Al had dubbed it. Not only was he working with a crew, but also every few minutes someone would come around to ask questions about Joe's being taken by the M. P.'s.

He wished they would leave him alone. He became curt with those working around him when they talked to him. Then suddenly he realized the true cause of his irritation was not the men around him but something else.

The moment he realized this he was able to isolate it. It was a strange tingling, almost an electric shock, that seeped through him each time his machine welder was operating. It seemed to originate near his right hip.

He thought of the charrymn and

wondered if that could be acting up. But it hadn't done so before. Memory of having taken Joe's when the M. P.'s were coming flashed into his thoughts. So that was it!

They had some strange power, perhaps very weak; but when there were two of them together their combined power affected the nervous system! He quickly transferred one of them to the left pocket of his trousers.

The relief was immediate. The irritating waves stopped.

The welder was set up for a run. He stopped over, absently reaching for the toggleswitch. He missed it, and automatically brought his eyes to it to guide his finger. What he saw sent a tingling shock through him. His finger was half buried in the switchbox!

Instinctively he jerked it away, and saw it pull out of the solidity of the machine unharmed. Puzzled, he brought his finger against the toggle arm, feeling it touch lightly. He pushed—and his finger passed through the solid plastic.

A fear greater than any he had ever experienced took hold. Trembling, he reached into his left pocket, hoping that his fingers would be able to hold the charrymn he had just placed there. It was solid to his fingers. He took it out and put it back with the other one.

He looked around. No one was paying any attention to him. They had noticed nothing. Had there really been anything for them to notice? The sight of his finger half buried in solid matter rose before his eyes. The fear returned. It rose from some deep corner of his mind that believed in black magic and voodoo spirits. He trembled almost visibly, not able to quiet himself. And waves of torture crept from the two charrymn into his hip.

"WHAT'S THE matter with you, Hank?" Al asked as they

met at the trucks at quitting time.

"Nothing!" Henry said. "Shut up—and for God's sake stick close to me."

Half an hour later when the truck stopped in front of the dorm building they hurried inside to see if Joe had returned yet. He hadn't.

Henry left Al and went into the reading room. He scribbled a hasty note: "Must see you immediately. V vitally important." He addressed the envelope to C. P. O. XXX and dropped it in the box, then rejoined Al.

"How about letting me in on what's eating you?" Al asked.

"I don't know myself," Henry said. "I wish I did."

They joined the drift into the dining room. A fit of trembling possessed Henry. Al gripped his shoulder, sympathy in his eyes.

"Thanks," Henry mumbled. He felt the trembling gradually subside.

They had nearly finished eating when the same four M. P.'s that had come for Joe in the morning came into the dining room. Henry breathed a soft sigh of relief.

"Are they coming for you or me?" Al muttered. "What'll we do about the charrymns?"

"Probably you," Henry said. "Give yours to me."

He regretted his impulse. If two of the mysterious things did so much to him, three would be infinitely worse. But some corner of his mind seemed to have taken over his will. He felt Al's hand thrust a napkin wrapped small object in his hand. He wrapped the napkin around it more completely and slipped it into his pocket with the other two. Now he had all three!

The M. P.'s stopped by them.

"Are you Henry Prince?" one of them asked. As he nodded, "Come with us please."

Henry stood up slowly, pretending surprise. He looked toward Al with what he hoped was questioning help-

lessness, then went with the M. P.'s.

As he followed the guards to their car and it sped toward its destination, Henry tried to pin down the cause of his fear. There was so much he didn't know, so much he knew that didn't make sense at all. The red beings and their ability to materialize and dematerialize at will. The flat statement the "devil" had made that the Lotissivians couldn't reach them. Honey's interest in things that indicated she was connected with what was going on. Her disappearance and Joe's arrest. The apparent fear the Lotissivians had for something in the United States. The building of this fantastically gigantic structure. The Lotissivians themselves! Where had they come from? No one knew. They had just appeared and conquered the world in a day, when the world was in the midst of a global war that had lain waste to all Europe as each side rained atom bombs on the troops of the enemy in the battle arena, leaving each other's homeland alone for fear of direct reprisals.

The whole thing swirled round and round in his thoughts, resolving nothing except large blank areas that needed filling in. Thinking couldn't help. Not yet. Instinct, or some sixth sense, whispered to Henry that he was at the focus of forces more immense than the military forces of the Lotissivians, that in some way he held everything in the palm of his hand, that if he could grasp all the threads that dangled around him he could act.

Act in what way? What did he want? What did Major Winthrop want? Permanent occupation by the Lotissivians? Defeat of the alien space horde and a return to the old status quo? What then? What of the strange red devils?

Henry shook his head hopelessly. He was beginning to feel that the major had been right in saying he

lacked comprehension and exercised faulty judgement. Even now he might be doing the wrong thing.

The car halted. Henry climbed out, flanked by the M. P.'s. They entered a room where several uniformed men lounged about. An officer sitting behind a desk looked sharply at Henry, then down to a paper on the desk.

"Put him in fourteen. Search him and put all his things in a large envelope."

"Wait a minute," Henry said hastily. "I thought I was being taken to—just why was I picked up? Am I under arrest?"

"You're under arrest!" the man behind the desk said.

Henry was reaching into his pocket as he spoke. He casually transferred one of the charrymns to his left hand pocket.

"But why?" he asked. He could feel the strange, exhilarating coolness begin to spread through him.

An M. P. stepped over to him, reaching to take one of his arms. His hand passed through the arm and was buried half way to the elbow!

"What the—!" the man exclaimed.

The room was growing shadowy, unsubstantial. The M. P.'s were shadowy figures running around, even through the same space he stood in. There frantic voices were weak and off tone as they asked each other where he had gone to.

"You are really a man of unsuspected talents, Mr. Prince," a crisp voice sounded at Henry's shoulder.

He turned in the direction of the voice. The being standing there was very similar to the one he had met before, but somewhat larger and redder of skin. And it was very solid in this new world of shadows.

"**W**HO ARE you?" Henry asked. "You aren't the one I saw before."

"No," the being said. "Unfortunately he was captured. It couldn't be helped. Now we must do something which will probably shock you very much. I'd suggest you close your eyes and trust me completely. It will save you a great deal of mental anguish."

"All right," Henry said, wondering why he did so.

He felt a cool hand grip his wrist. It pulled. He went in the direction it led him.

As unaccountably as he had given in to the creature's request he opened his eyes and looked back. He stopped, frozen with horror. In the shadowy world about him he saw a figure lying on the floor, the shadows of the M. P.'s rushing toward it. And the figure on the floor was his own!

He was only vaguely aware of the next few moments. Later he had a vague memory of jerking away from the grasp of the being and running back to the inert form of shadow, of getting down on his hands and knees and trying to lie in the same position, of feeling something reach out and draw him into that shadowy form.

Then abruptly he was opening his eyes and the shadows were solid again, the M. P.'s quite real and comfortably solid. He looked around him. The red devil-like creature was gone.

"What happened?" he asked weakly.

The M. P.'s looked at one another doubtfully.

"You fainted—I guess," one of them growled.

Henry stood up shakily. He slipped his right hand into his pocket. It was empty. He looked over at the desk. There was a brown envelope laying there, containing the contents of his pockets.

Right at the moment he didn't care whether the charrymns were in that envelope or in the possession of that being.



Another M. P. chuckled nervously.

"We thought for a few minutes you were dead," he said. "You didn't even have a pulse."

"I thought I was dead too," Henry said. He grinned when they looked at him queerly.

"What should we do?" one of them asked the man at the desk. "Take him to Fourteen or the hospital?"

"Fourteen," the man at the desk replied. "We'll get a doctor over later to look at him."

With a strong hand gripping each arm, Henry was led over to a door and through it along a hall. He was stopped before a door numbered fourteen. An M. P. opened the door, stepping to one side. Henry felt himself pushed roughly forward through the doorway. He didn't fall, but before he could stop himself and turn around he heard the door slam, and the sound of the lock being turned with metallic finality.

He looked around, wondering if that red being had followed him. If what he had experienced was any indication, it could be right in the room with him now, seeing him as a shadowy form.

His attention jerked to the wall opposite to where he had entered. There was a second door there, closed. He crossed to it and cautiously twisted the knob, pushing gently. The door opened an inch. He paused before opening it farther.

A light was dawning in his mind. Of course it would have happened this way. He had asked to see Major Winthrop. They didn't want him to come openly, so they had "arrested" him and put him in a cell—which opened into another room where the major was waiting for him.

He pushed the door wide and started to enter. Instantly he was enwrapped in what he numbly recognized as high voltage electric sparks that

jumped out from the door frame and shot into him, jerking his muscles spasmodically.

He leaped forward, aware of the smell of ozone, trying to land on his feet, but falling forward. He landed painfully and lay half dazed, hearing the door he had just come through slam shut.

He lifted himself to his hands and knees and glanced up. Standing in front of him, with a half smile on too-handsome lips in an elfin face dominated by a bulging brow, was the living replica of the many pictures Henry had seen of the Lotissivians!

HENRY turned over and sat on the floor without taking his eyes from the extraterrestrial. There was something just right in the alien proportions of that face and figure. The Lotissivian was about four feet tall and his skin was milky white, his eyes a deep violet bordering on black.

"Nothing seems to have entered with him," a voice said. Henry's eyes jerked in that direction. It belonged to a second Lotissivian. There were several in the room.

"I think I owe you an explanation for this reception," the Lotissivian said, turning back to Henry. "This room is specially constructed for our safety. Its walls are laminated, with alternate layers of metal and insulation, with a difference of potential between each plate high enough to prevent *anything* from passing through. I believe you know what I am referring to?"

Henry nodded.

"The only vulnerable avenue," the Lotissivian went on, "is the doorway. We have done all we can to reduce the risk from that direction to a minimum. The electrical display serves the dual purpose of making it impossible for certain beings to enter by concealing themselves within the space of

your body as you enter, and of making them hesitate while you enter until we can get the door closed again and connected to the condenser pattern."

Henry let his eyes explore the room. It was large. At the far end were built-in bunks, enough to accommodate at least fifty people.

"Why am I here?" Henry asked.

"Certain developments have made it necessary," the Lotissivian said. "By the way, my name is Annas. I want you to tell me all you know concerning the disappearance of the girl named Honey Childs."

"But I know absolutely nothing about it!" Henry said.

In his thoughts he was trying desperately to make up his mind what to do. Should he trust these Lotissivians? They were the conquerors, and therefore the enemy. They held the Earth in captivity. But he instinctively liked them. He tried to force back the thought that he should trust them completely. It persisted.

"We know you know a great deal about it," Annas said. "Not connected with the direct act of her disappearance, perhaps, but bearing on it."

"I think, I should say nothing," Henry said, "unless allowed to consult with my superior officer and get his instructions."

"Who is your superior officer?" Annas asked.

"If you don't know the answer to that question," Henry said, "then I don't think I should tell you."

"Is it Major Winthrop?"

Henry shrugged without answering. His mind was working at high speed on speculations. He had assumed that his hasty note had been received by the major, and that that was the reason why the M. P.'s had come to get him. When they had put him in a cell under arrest he had doubted. Now he was doubting again.

Annas spoke in a strange tongue. One of the other Lotissivians went to a desk and lifted a telephone. He dialed a number. After a short wait he spoke into the phone, cupping the mouthpiece so that Henry couldn't hear what was said.

When he hung up he spoke to Annas again in the strange language.

"I see," Annas said. "Major Winthrop says you are one of his undercover agents. We had not known that. You gave yourself away when you asked to speak to your chief. A laborer doesn't have a chief to speak to and get instructions."

He smiled at the stricken expression on Henry's face.

"And for your information," he went on, "Arras did not call Major Winthrop just now. He just pretended to. We have found out what we wanted to know from your reactions. We will now get the major here and discover what is going on."

"Do you know what's happened to Honey Childs?" Henry asked as the one called Arras went back to the phone.

"No, Mr. Prince," Annas said. "But we are going to find out if we have to tear this entire world into its component atoms. You see, she is a Lotissivian."

"A Lotissivian!" Henry gasped. "But—but she doesn't look like you. She's—human!"

"And what do you think *we* are," Annas said coldly. "The Lotissivian female is taller than the male, her brain much smaller, but no less capable I assure you."

"So!" Henry breathed. "That accounts for a lot. Poor Joe."

"Yes," Annas said emotionlessly, "he's in love with her. And so are you, which is natural. We have kept secret the fact that Lotissivian females are enough like Earth females of certain types of beauty to pass for

natives without any evident trouble."

Henry flushed angrily.

"Maybe I shouldn't say 'Poor Joe' so hastily," he said. "It could be that Honey prefers a *man* to your type."

He smiled in satisfaction as he saw Annas' face set in harsh lines for a moment.

A MELODIOUS chime sounded one brief note through the room. Annas turned toward the door Henry had come through, an expectant light in his eyes. Henry followed his gaze, saw the knob twist and the door come open.

Major Winthrop stood on the other side. His face was pale, he took a deep breath and jumped forward. There was a flare of electric discharge, then he was through. The door closed again.

"Well, Henry," the major said, "I see you've done it again."

"Yes sir," Henry said, flushing. "I'm not cut out for this work. I know that now. As soon as it's convenient I'll resign."

"Just why did you assume that I had you brought here?" the major asked.

"If I answer that," Henry said angrily, "I will be committing another blunder."

"Well answer it anyway."

"I mailed a request to see you," Henry said. "That was over two hours ago. When the M. P.'s came for me it was a natural assumption that you had sent them."

"I didn't get the note," Major Winthrop said. "Too soon."

"How was I to know it was too soon?" Henry said. "I had assumed that such letters were given speedy delivery."

"This is interesting," Annas cut in. "How are such letters addressed?"

"They're addressed to my department," the major said quickly.

"Aha! You are too quick with the

answer," Annas said, delighted. "Tell me how the address reads."

"C. P. O. XXX," Major Winthrop said. "The C. P. O. means 'care of Postmaster', which takes the letter directly to the postmaster's office where the letter is redirected according to the code letters designating its address. The XXX is the code number for my office."

"But I understood the code letters for your office were U. O. 5," Annas said.

"Too many people might know of that," the major said uncomfortably. "To protect Prince we gave our department a special designation for his work."

"Let it go," Annas said, his tone implying that he knew more than they suspected. "Instruct Mr. Prince to tell us all he has accomplished and all he knows relating to the assignment he is on."

"Go ahead, Henry," the major said tonelessly.

"There's a lot I didn't know that I wish now I had," Henry began. "I didn't know Honey Childs was a Lotissivian—"

He saw the sudden look of alarm and self-condemnation appear in Annas' eyes, and the pleased delight in the major's.

"And I didn't know," Henry said slowly, "that the Lotissivians can't touch at least half the population of this planet."

"But the United States isn't half—" the major began, then stopped.

"They could occupy the U. S.," Henry said. "They can conquer every living person on Earth. What they can't do is occupy Hell!" He read how close he had hit the mark, in Annas' expression. "Yes," he went on. "There's a lot I don't know even yet. But I can guess. It may be that besides Hell there's the counterpart of what we call Heaven. And until the

Lotissivians can invade Heaven and Hell and subdue them, they'll never be complete masters of this planet, or even able to stay here safely. That is, unless this giant building is finished and properly protected all around with high potential condenser barriers to keep out the dead."

"Are you insane?" Major Winthrop said. He studied Annas' expression and shook his head slowly: "No, I guess not. You can't be right, but you must be close to something that is the truth."

"By a remarkable stroke of insight," Annas said, "Mr. Prince has hit upon the truth. But he could not have done so without knowing a great deal that he hasn't told."

"I can't believe it," Major Winthrop said. "That red devil whose corpse we found this morning certainly wasn't a spirit or real devil. He's made of flesh and blood. Solid stuff that the doctor's knife can cut and place under a microscope. Cellular structure that the microscope brings out. The doctor's official opinion in his written report is that the thing is either derived from the human race or a product of convergent evolution of an unrelated type of warm-blooded life. It definitely isn't a soul of a dead person that once lived."

"Sometimes thoughts expressed by you people of Earth are very difficult to grasp," Annas said. "Not because they are deep but because they are couched in incompleteness. However, I gather vaguely what you mean. Do not be surprised if the pieces of this creature your doctor has pasted onto the microscope slides vanish with the rest of him by morning. And now, Major, you will instruct Mr. Prince to tell me everything he knows, and you will leave before he starts talking."

Henry looked keenly at the major, trying to fathom what he should do

and hoping the major would give some indication.

"You will tell Annas everything he wishes to know, and co-operate with him in every way, Henry," the major said. But there was the barest suggestion of a twitch to his right eye as he gave the order.

"Yes, sir," Henry said.

"That's all, then," Major Winthrop said, going to the door.

"NOW," ANNAS said when the door had closed. "Now I'm going to do something even your shrewd insight will not have foreseen. I'm not going to ask you anything. I merely wanted the major to think I would. And I didn't miss the wink that countermanded his verbal order."

"Then what are you going to do?" Henry asked, liking this bulging headed midget more and more.

"In spite of your superior officer's low opinion of your judgment, I find it much superior to that of the average Earth being," Annas said. "So I'm going to paint you a word picture. Sit down and relax."

His smile was completely friendly. Henry found himself unable to keep from responding to it as he crossed over to a chair and sat down.

"You may smoke too, if you wish to," Annas said. And, as Henry took out a cigarette and lit it, "You know, it's a real treat to see a man of this planet that I can call my equal in intelligence. And mind you, I'm not trying to flatter you or even impress you. It's a statement of fact. You have divined practically everything, and most of what I want to talk to you about is either known to you or would become immediately apparent if you had the leisure to think it over."

"At present," Annas continued, "you're torn between loyalties and logics. Even your government leaders are the same. In every country we find



a strong feeling that it would be better to have continued world anarchy rather than law and order under the light yoke of a race alien to your planet. Emotionally that is your universal reaction. Intellectually you universally recognize that if our domination is impersonal and unselfish, and permits complete liberty to develop life and potentialities so long as they do not inflict trouble on others, then it is much better to submit to us. Actually our coming here is somewhat the same in purpose as your sending missionaries to backward countries. You have nothing we would care to possess or take away with us. Your minerals? We do not need them. Actually, we are gathering and bringing down into Russia from outer space far more of the metals going into this structure than are being mined."

"Where do you come from?" Henry asked. "No one seems to know. From one of the other planets?"

"No. Certainly not," Annas said. "Our force of eight billion is just a small contingent one."

"From the planetary system of some star?" Henry asked.

"Not that either," Annas said. "Originally, of course. But that was long ago. A very long time ago. No, we come from regions in interstellar space where we have constructed thousands of cubic miles of habitable structures similar to this little box-like structure we are having you Earthmen construct here. Most of the races of the Cosmos eventually migrate to interstellar space. Our own, the Litissivians, are one of the average groups. We number around eighty thousand billion."

"Interstellar space," Henry said. "Why have you bothered with us? I mean, if this invasion of our planet is just a missionary trip to you, why have you made it now rather than in the past?"

"The reason is twofold," Annas said. "First, until you entered the borders of our region your welfare was beyond our jurisdiction. Second, now that you have entered our jurisdiction you are our responsibility. And since you will be here for about four hundred years of your time, we must either get things in order here on your planet in a hurry or have a lot of work ahead of us. We'd like to establish peace and harmony as soon as possible."

"And in four hundred years you will pull up stakes and let the Solar System go its merry way?" Henry asked.

"That's right," Annas said. "And in four hundred years we hope to have brought knowledge to every part of the Earth and raised its living standards so that all countries are as well off as the United States will be by then."

"I'm trying to grasp what you say," Henry said. "It's on too grand a scale for me to take easily. It implies that there is a sort of mapping out of all space like we mark off nations here on the Earth's surface, and that the Solar System, is like a train moving across the United States, in which you can drink alcoholic beverages for a couple of hundred miles and then you come to a stretch where it's against the law because you're in a dry state. What region did we just pass out of before we entered the Lotissivian region of space?"

"Before you entered *Lotissiv? Vetapuissa*," Annas said calmly.

"And are the Vetapuissans built like you?"

"Very much so," Annas said, "Though probably less so than even you people of Earth."

"Then all intelligent races in the universe had a common origin?"

"No. Definitely not," Annas said. "Your race and mine did not have a

common origin. I see you don't believe that. Let me ask you this: would you believe that sulphur, oxygen, and hydrogen could combine on Mars to form sulphuric acid?"

"Of course!" Henry said, "So long as the temperature was such that it could exist."

"All life structures," Annas said, "arise from a basic pattern that is inherent in the properties of matter. It's no more remarkable than sulphuric acid; basically, though almost infinitely more complex."

"I'll have to take your word for that," Henry said. "But answer me this. Suppose there were some scientific principle you haven't yet discovered, and by means of it you Lötis-sivians were driven away from our planet. What would happen? Are you out to assume full responsibility for our well being, *even if you have to blow us out of existence to do it?*"

"There are no scientific principles we have not discovered," Annas said.

"Thanks," Henry said. "Thanks very much, Annas. You've told me what I wanted to know."

**T**HE ONE named Arras burst out rapidly in his strange language. Annas listened, his face gradually taking on an expression of ludicrous surprise.

As Arras continued, Annas' expression became thoughtful, then bitter, and finally settled into a mold of almost pouting resignation. Arras stopped.

There was a long moment of silence. Annas bowed with great dignity to Henry.

"My respects to one more cunning than I," he said stiffly. "You may leave now, Prince."

Henry's mouth dropped open in astonishment at this sudden development. Annas remained partly bent in a stiff-backed bow, the expression of

restrained bitterness on his face.

Henry turned slowly and went to the door, looked back at Annas who remained as he was, unmoving as a statue.

"Look—" Henry began, then stopped, not knowing what to say.

He opened the door and took a deep breath, then jumped through, feeling the electric flames lick at him briefly.

The door closed. He was alone in the small bare room. He tried the outer door. It was unlocked. He pushed it open and went out, and on to the outer office.

The M.P.'s seemed to be expecting him. They returned his things, including the three charrymns. He took them, hiding his bewilderment and amazement.

"We'll take you back to your quarters," one of them said, smiling politely.

thought he detected something close to fear lurking in the man's eyes.

"Okay," he said, taking each object from the envelope and dropping it in his pockets.

He waited until the last with the three charrymns, leaving them in plain sight on the desk top. The one

Henry looked at him sharply and belonging to Al was still tightly wrapped in the napkin. He placed it and one of the other two in his right hand pocket. Last, he picked up the third one, holding it in his hand.

The now familiar soothing coolness was creeping from the charrymn in his hand up into his arm.

The memory of the nightmare he had experienced a short hour before struck him with all its horror. Instantly he dropped the charrymn into his pocket with the other two.

But just before it left his hand he had a fleeting impression of seeing that red creature step past him as though coming from behind. Then the

three charrymns were nestled together in his pocket, and everything seemed normal.

He looked around, smiling. The face of every man in the room was deadly white.

"What's the matter with you guys?" Henry asked. "Seen a ghost?"

"Come on, Pri—" The man who spoke turned abruptly and started toward the exit.

The four M. P's were silent as they drove back to the dorm building. When Henry climbed out they sped away, not looking back.

Feeling that the whole world was more than slightly askew, Henry went into the building. The overhead lights were out, leaving only the small wall lights to cast a faint illumination.

He walked softly down the aisles between rows of cots until he came to his own. He stopped abruptly, surprised. Joe was in his own bed, sound asleep. Joe was back.

He undressed, slid into his blankets, closed his eyes, then opened them again because the red haze that rose in his mind was worse than the semi-darkness. But they wouldn't stay open. Finally he gave in and left them closed, while the red haze grew deeper and deeper in color and depth. There seemed to be movement in it, vague movements as though unseen things were moving about, disturbing it by setting up currents.

"Just the blood in my eyelids," he muttered wearily.

ALMOST IN answer, something white appeared at the border of his vision. There seemed to be shape to it, an elusive shape that seemed to come toward him. Something heavy came to rest against his shoulder. Its weight was comforting, soothing. The tiredness in his body seemed to retreat from the weight on his shoulder.

The white shape was becoming

clearer now. It had a face. Joe's face.

"This is remarkable!" he thought. "I can see Joe bending over me, and my eyes are closed!"

He could see the face quite clearly now. It was Joe, but a different Joe than he had seen in waking life. The features were unmistakably the same, but in some undefinable way they seemed to embody what he had sensed in the Lotissivians. A rightness. Perfection.

Perfection! A surge of intense hatred flooded through him. An impulse took hold of him to rise up and strike at Joe. It died as quickly as it appeared, leaving him weak. He marvelled at it. He had never before experienced such intense hatred. It was a completely new emotional experience. It was like all the other things he had been experiencing. Insane things.

Like the things he had said when he was with Annas. He didn't know what he said, really. He had just said things. And Annas had been very impressed. That was odd too.

As when he had put on a knowing look after Annas had said that the Lotissivians knew every scientific principle, and he had said, "Thanks. Thanks very much. That's what I wanted to know." Crazy. But not half as crazy as Annas' and Arras' reaction.

Egotistical little shrimps, the Lotissivians, thinking they knew everything, when they didn't know about the charrymns and how, by placing them on either side of you, you could slip over a little ways into the plane or place or state, or whatever it was, where the red devils were.

Egotistical. No wonder they hadn't asked him any questions. They thought they knew everything.

But suppose they did? Suppose they knew all about the charrymns too? Something clicked in Henry's mind, and he knew suddenly that Annas did

know about the charrymns.

But if he knew, then why didn't the Lotissivians use that knowledge to build weapons that could enable them to conquer Hell itself?

It was crazy. And that devil lying in the street, dead. How could a devil die? It must be that even the dead can die. But these devils weren't dead. They were alive, only in a different kind of existence, like when he himself lay dead and was still alive in that other place, and went back and lay down and crawled back into his body and it came to life again.

There was something there, if he could only pin it down. It wasn't superstition or religion, but something real. Something that was a part of nature, just as intelligent races always have human shape because that is the inevitable nature of the evolution of life from inert matter. Just as sulphuric acid made on Mars wouldn't be evolved from sulphuric acid made on Earth, though it would be the same stuff.

It was inevitable. Everything was inevitable. If he could see things clearly as they really were he would know what to do. That was what Annas was trying to do, make him see everything as it really was. And that was what Major Winthrop had tried to do. The major had said his judgment was faulty because he didn't have a proper grasp of things. Annas had said his judgment was better than any other person's. Flattery. But they had both been right. That was funny too. They said opposite things and were both right.

He looked up into the white, infinitely kind face hovering over him. Joe's face and yet not Joe's face. He was looking up at it, and yet his eyes were closed tight.

He began to shudder. The pressure, the comforting pressure of Joe's hand on his shoulder, increased. The shud-

dering became sobbing. He knew he wasn't making any noise, but he was crying. He hadn't cried since he was a baby. Then why was he crying?

He hung onto that question in his thoughts, revolving it around. It was tied in with all the other things that had happened. It was as though his whole emotional complex had gone haywire.

Suddenly, in one convulsive move, he sat up and opened his eyes, feeling Joe's hand slide from his shoulder as he did so. The answer had come to him in that instant.

"Everyone there knew it except me!" he said softly.

"Knew what?" Joe growled.

"That I was *the* Prince," Henry answered.

"**A**L!" JOE hissed. "Wake up, Al!"

"Huh?" Al's voice sounded. He sat up, blinking. "Oh, you're back."

"We've got to get dressed and take Hank to the doctor," Joe whispered.

"I don't need to go to the doctor," Henry said, his teeth chattering.

"You need something to quiet your nerves," Joe said. "Come on, Al, wake up."

"I'm awake," Al said. He slid to the foot of his cot and started getting dressed.

"Take care of Hank while I get some clothes on," Joe said.

"But I don't want to see the doctor!" Henry said insistently.

He struggled to free himself from Joe's grasp.

"Hold him, Al. Don't let him get away," Joe said. He dressed quickly.

"Now we'll get him dressed," he said.

He picked up Henry's trousers.

"Stick out your legs, Hank," he ordered quietly.

"No!" Henry said.

"Come on, Hank," Al murmured.

Henry struggled more violently. Al



had his arms pinned behind him. He looked meaningfully at Joe.

Joe nodded sadly, leaned forward, and tapped Henry just under the ear.

"Neat," Al said as Henry went slack. "What happened to him?"

"I don't know," Joe muttered, slipping Henry's trousers on him. "I think this business is too big for us. I wish we were out of it."

"What's the matter?" someone asked from another cot.

"Hank's sick," Joe said. "We're taking him to the doctor."

Supporting Henry between them they made their way along the aisles.

"Keep an eye on him while I drop a note to the major," Joe said.

They eased him into a chair. Joe looked down at Henry's relaxed features, his eyes full of pity. Then he went into the reading room and wrote hastily, covering both sides of the paper. Then he sealed the letter and dropped it into the mailbox.

When he returned he was just in time to see Al strike something out of Henry's hand.

Henry leaped from the chair and dived after the rolling object. It came toward Joe who reached down and caught it, holding it up to look at it. When he saw what it was he dropped it quickly into his pocket and looked around uneasily. It had been one of the charrymns.

"Give me that!" Henry said.

"Don't do it, Joe," Al warned. "He was trying to call up that red devil."

"No I wasn't," Henry said. "I was trying to do something else. I have two more of them, you know. But it takes all three to do what I was going to do."

"Tell us about it, Hank," Joe said.

"It's something I discovered," Henry said eagerly. "With two of them in my pocket and the third one in my hand or the other pocket, I can slip over to where they come from.

Give it back to me and I'll show you."

"Suppose you give me the two you have and let me try it myself," Joe said.

"No!" Henry said. "It was my idea."

He held out his hand imperiously, his eyes feverish. Joe saw Al stealing up behind Henry. He reached toward his pocket slowly, giving Al time to reach him.

Al shoved Henry forward. Joe hit him on the chin, then caught him as he slumped toward the floor.

"Absolutely crazy!" Al murmured.

"No, I don't think so," Joe said.

"Let's get him to the doctor. But first—" He reached into Henry's pocket and brought out the other two charrymns, dropping them into his pocket with the other one. "Now he can't try anything with these things."

"**H**OLD HIM, boys," the doctor said. "I've got to have him still or I can't get the needle in."

"You're crazy to do this, Joe," Henry shouted. "Crazy, do you hear? You've been tricked. She isn't human. She's a Lotissivian. Let her rot in hell. You can't go there. They'll kill her if you try it."

"Okay," the doctor said, pulling out the empty needle.

Joe and Al hung on grimly as Henry's struggling weakened the light of madness dying out in his eyes. When his movements ceased they released him and stepped back.

"He'll be all right now, boys," the doctor said. "That'll last him all night. In the morning before he wakes up we'll put a strait jacket on him. Know him long?"

"Yeah," Joe said. "A long time. Come on, Al. Let's go."

The floor under his feet shook slightly. A rumbling, almost inaudible roar seemed to emanate from the walls.

"Quick!" Joe said. He ran to the door and out of the hospital building, Al following him.

The quake was not repeated, but the atmosphere was heavy and thick. An electric tension seemed to be everywhere. In the distance things seemed to merge into a reddish haze.

A strange crackling sound began. It grew until it sounded like the rustling of millions of ants marching to battle. The metal they ran across became luminous. Electric flame of deep violet licked upward from it, forming a carpet of radiant violet fire. It was spreading, driving into the red haze, dissipating it.

"There's a truck over there," Joe shouted.

He ran to it. Al climbed in as he started the motor. In a moment the truck was speeding through the blue fire and red fog toward the distant wall of the upper level.

A bolt of lightning zagged down from above, crashing into the floor across which they raced. It left a smoking, glowing hole. Joe spun the wheel, narrowly missing the gap.

Another bolt struck to the right of the truck. Then another and another.

"The fools," Joe muttered. He hugged the wheel closer, his eyes wary.

Al clung to his seat, staring alternately at Joe and the holocaust outside. Joe, sensing his stare flashed him a grin.

"We'll make it," he said.

"What makes you so sure?" Al grunted.

"I don't know," Joe said, frowning, his eyes intent on the roadway ahead.

A flash of lightning came toward them. It broke and spread out in an umbrella shape that fell completely around the speeding truck.

"See what I mean?" Joe said.

"That would have been a direct hit. What stopped it like that? I don't

know, but I felt that nothing could touch us. Nothing *can* touch us. I don't know why, but I know it's so."

They reached the tunnel that led into the upper structure. With unabated speed Joe drove along it. He went deeper and deeper. At last he braked to an abrupt stop. He was out of the truck and running into a small corridor by the time Al had opened the door on his side.

"Hurry, Al," he called back.

The floor underfoot was shaking again, more violently than before. A rumbling roar rose to deafening proportions. They reached a door and pulled it open.

Inside, several men in military police uniforms jumped up in surprise and started forward. Then they fell back, their faces paling perceptibly. They were ignoring him, staring at Joe.

Suddenly Al, too, stopped in his tracks, staring. For something was happening to Joe.

He seemed to be enveloped in an aura of white radiance. And he had stopped running now.

He stood in the center of the room, an air of expectancy on his face. Al saw him reach into a pocket and bring something out in his fist.

Then slowly he faded from sight.

"I TELL YOU I don't know what happened then," Joe said. "I held one of the three charrymns in my hand like Hank had said he did. I saw everybody staring at me like they were seeing a ghost. You did too, Al." He grinned at Al. "The room and everyone in it faded until everything I had been looking at before was shadowy. Like fog with definite shape to it. But other things were coming into sight. Remember that red fog, Al? It really got red! It glowed red like fire in a furnace. But around me everything was free of the red light.

A wisp would dart in and dissolve into nothing before it could reach me. And in that red, glowing fog were dozens of those fellows with pointed ears. I just got a brief impression of them, and of one that seemed to literally radiate force.

"Then suddenly I seemed to be caught up in a storm of white light. I felt— There aren't words even to begin to describe how I felt. Like a god. I *was* a god. I was a huge sun radiating heat that withered everything around me, yet I was cool. I was a harmless old man radiating kindness. I was—oh what's the use. It was like standing in the middle of a factory and trying to imagine yourself as *being* the factory. Actually I was the center of something going on around me, focused through me, like light is focused through a lens. I seemed to know everything and understand everything, and now I can't even remember much of it. I knew that those three charrymns were what made the whole thing possible. You held the key, Hank, and didn't know it. It was those charrymns, the way they worked when one human being had them."

"But the Lotissivians knew about them!" Henry said.

"Not what you knew about them," Joe said. "Your namesake, the Prince, put that thought in your head to keep it a secret. We were both puppets. That's all. Puppets."

"What about me?" Honey Childs asked.

"You were a goat staked out for the lion."

"Are you sure you aren't a Lotissivian, Honey?" Henry asked. "Annas said you were."

"The reason he said she was," Joe said, "was because he wasn't talking to you then. He was talking to your namesake."

"No," Honey said. A queer, cramped

expression crossed her face. "I was a Lotissivian. Just like you were Satan, Hank, and you were God, Joe. Only I was a Lotissivian for days and days, while you two were what you were for just moments. The Lotissivians know all about it. I learned something about it while she and I were together."

"Atoms act on one another like keys and locks act on one another. Or like radio broadcasters and receivers act together. When I was the Lotissivian woman I was still there, but sort of outside my body. And she was inside."

"Like when I saw myself lying on the floor and crawled back into myself," Henry said.

"That's it," Honey said. "That's it exactly. The Lotissivian girl said I couldn't know what really went on because all I could see or sense was what the ideas in my mind fitted. All the rest passed over my head like it wasn't there. And half of what I thought I saw or experienced wasn't true, but only symbolic of what happened, like dreams are symbolic of things going on in the subconscious that the censor of the mind won't let come into consciousness." She shuddered suddenly. "I was just remembering that awful ride back up on that beam that was being lifted from the ground."

THE DOOR opened. Major Winthrop came in.

"Trying to figure things out?" he asked. "I'd suggest you don't try. Your plane will be ready to take off as soon as you get on board."

He sat down in an empty chair.

"I think you understand the reason you have to go back to the States. All of you," he said. "You're no good to us any more. You've been through too much and you're too vulnerable now to the forces still loose in the world, the forces we used to call the

forces of darkness. I want you to try to look at things my way. It'll be easier for you to forget.

"Consider some little tribe of savages that for generations has never been a hundred miles from where it was born. One day a mechanized army shows up, then another, and there's a big battle. After that prefabricated houses are put up, refrigerators make ice cubes, radios blare music, helicopters drop out of the sky and bring other people and take some that were there.

"The natives try to understand how the radio picks music out of the air around them, how the refrigerator takes the water dipped out of the river and turns it to ice that can melt and be river water again. They try to understand that the evil spirit that comes from the god in the volcano to punish them is nothing but germs that can be seen through a microscope.

"Get the idea? We're just like that. From the cosmic point of view we're just a little ball of matter with a couple of billion planet-imprisoned people on it. We've denied the existence of a lot of things we didn't know how to explain, or we've been superstitious about them. We're faced now with the realization that we're still savages ignorant of most of the basic things, unable to adjust our minds to the things the Lotissivians consider commonplace.

"Things are pretty much straightened out now. With the help of a big and powerful tribal chieftain on the other side of the mountain, so to speak, a tribe of cannibals has been wiped out.

"And there's great promise that our grandchildren will have a chance to learn how ice cubes come from river water.

"What you went through was no more incomprehensible in its way

than the native using the white man's firestick to blow the head off an enemy while fainting at the recoil against his shoulder and the big noise it makes. Everything's relative.

"Take this gigantic building the Lotissivians are going to leave their permanent occupation force in. It's on no grander a scale for them than it would be for the missionary to have the natives make mud bricks and build him a three-story house.

"The analogy makes everything fairly understandable. Even that red devil that got killed when you were being kidnapped after you dropped Joe off that night, Honey. Remember, Henry, that Annas said he'd vanish, and even the sections of him on the microscope slides would disappear?" Major Winthrop grinned and spread his arms. "The *ice cube* melted as he said it would!"

"That was terrible—and strange," Honey said. "Those strange creatures were materializing out of thin air, and all of a sudden I seemed to have the power to glow all over. Then that one ran into me and dropped to the ground. After that—"

A look of terror crossed her face. She started to tremble.

"Forget about it," Major Winthrop said. "Most of the horror of it rises from fear of the unknown. The same thing that scares the wits out of you if something taps you on the shoulder when you walk through a cemetery alone at night."

**H**IS CONFIDENT chuckle was infectious. Honey stopped trembling.

"I wish you'd come with us, Major," she said. "You make it all seem so—ordinary. When I stood on that big beam being raised up from the supply platform and I started to get solid again, that man nearly jumped off, he was so frightened."



"Where were you before you got on that beam?" Al asked.

"I—oh, don't ask me! I don't know! I don't know!" Honey started to cry.

"Why don't you keep your mouth shut?" Joe growled. "She was in Hell. Do you expect her to remember that?"

"Not Hell," Major Winthrop said. "That's just a myth, like the angry god in the volcano. Say she was in the hands of a tribe of cannibals. Human beings, but a different tribe in a different land, more bestial, maybe incurably barbaric."

The major stood up and went to the door.

"Time for you to go," he said. "Try to find happiness in your grass huts back home. And whenever you remember and get afraid try to think

of the native in Africa who met an ice cube for the first time."

He stood in the doorway watching as they crossed to the plane. They turned and waved at him, then disappeared inside. Shortly the plane moved across the flat metal expanse and took to the air.

He shaded his eyes to watch it until it vanished in the distance, then looked up at the silver flashes signaling the presence of the Lotissivian spaceships circling the Earth inside the Moon's orbit as the sunlight struck them and reflected downward.

"Did I do all right, Annas?" he whispered. And several miles away in the protected chamber the too-beautiful lips of the Lotissivian broke into a kindly smile.

"Right, indeed, Major," he murmured.

## BAD LUCK DAY

★ by JON BARRY ★

**F**OR OVER sixty years Francesca Mary Rose stayed in her home on a certain day each year for she felt that it was her special jinx day. When she was just a young girl, she and her mother had spent several days preparing their home for a special guest, for the man she intended to marry. After much preparation, Francesca sat all starched and ruffled and impatient, waiting for her fiancée to come down the road. Suddenly a strange horse and rider came pounding around the bend. It was his unpleasant task to inform her that there had been a train accident outside of town and that her beloved had been killed. For the next sixty years on the anniversary of his death, Francesca spent the day re-reading love letters and caressing the trousseau that had been folded away for so many years. She had a peculiar feeling about that day and always said she felt safer to stay at home. But when two dear young friends of Francesca chose her jinx day for their wedding day, she decided that perhaps she had been rather foolish and superstitious all those years and decided to go to the wedding. A friend picked her up in his automobile to take her to the church. Just five minutes later the car was rammed into by a truck. Francesca was killed.

★ ★ ★

## Automatic Translator

★ by J. R. MARKS ★

**A**MONG THE numerous automatic calculating machines which are being built all over the country in various government and University laboratories, is one in Washington which threatens to be the finest ever made. This calculating machine is the usual complex of vacuum tubes, relays, complicated wiring and intricate circuits—but with a difference. It has the ability to store and "remember" vast amounts of data. This is extremely valuable in certain computations, but what is more intriguing is the thought that it will be used in language work rather than in mathematics.

It is believed that with this machine an automatic translator can be built for any language. Somehow the vocabulary and grammatical structure of a given language will be injected into the machine. When documents, suitably coded are fed to the machine, their counterparts in *English*, will come out. How the scanning and selecting will work is of course a technician's nightmare. In a way this will be the closest approach to a thinking machine that man has yet devised.

It's hard to keep abreast of all the new inventions in the calculating field. They're coming so fast and so furiously that one is obsolete before the job is finished. It won't be long before the machine will be able to do anything—almost.

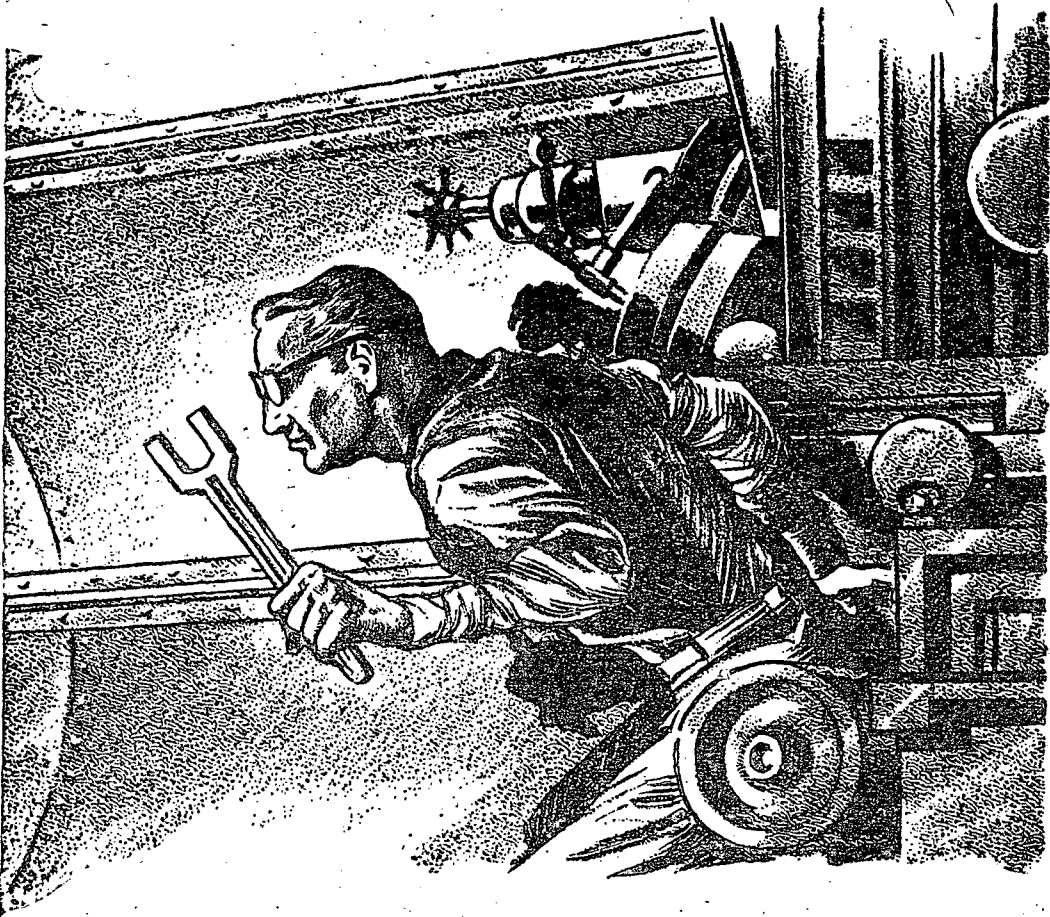
# REPAIR JOB

*By Roy B. Frentz*



There was a look of desperation on his face, for he knew he had to reach the other man...

**When Andrus was told not to land on Mars if danger threatened, they forgot that not only Martians can be deadly!**



**C**LI ANDRUS, at the control board of the ship, stiffened. His big hands tightened on the chair-arm cushions, and he stared straight ahead. Something alien gripped him. It crept into his mind, and formed a dark picture that was not of Earth. It seemed to be calling him, trying to give him a message.

The visi-plate ahead of him faded away as the alien grew stronger. Cli Andrus was in a cavern. Reddish haze

surrounded him. He saw a strange pattern of cylinders and spheres.

Just for a moment, before his mind recoiled, he had a vision of a huge bulbous thing near a cylinder. Then, in swift revulsion, he was free, in full control of himself and of the gleaming rocket that dropped slowly into the orbit of Mars. Beads of sweat sprang out on his forehead.

He banged his fist down on the button that rang General Alarm



through the ship.

Russ Ferry, a dark-faced man, nearly as tall as Andrus, came in fast. He snapped, "What's wrong?"

Seconds behind Ferry was Rad Marks, strutting pompously. Not even a general alarm made him hurry.

"Mars is inhabited," Cli Andrus said. He dug his fingernails into the arm cushions, and looked at the deck-plates. He said woodenly, "You know our orders."

It hurt him to say it. It meant he would not be the first man to land on Mars. And he'd lived and worked for that honor. His orders—his orders were strict: "Do not land if signs of intelligent life appear."

Old Gar Pollard, president of Earth Council, had explained, "We've been able to find no sign of life on Mars. Our most powerful telescope on the Moon has scanned the planet with negative results. Yet we are not sure. Martians, if they exist, may have retreated underground, close to sources of water. They may be a malignant life, which would attack and ravage Earth. We're positive they do not have space ships, or they would have come to us. Therefore we want no chance taken that a ship of ours would fall into their hands to give them the knowledge and technique necessary to launch an invasion of Earth. If signs of life appear, *do not land.*"

Cli Andrus had sworn on his oath to obey the order.

"I don't believe it," Russ Ferry said. He gestured toward the visiplate, where Mars spread in red splendor, filling the plate from edge to edge. "We're only nine hours out. I've been searching the surface and there's no sign of life."

"It's underground," Cli Andrus said. He told what had happened. "They had me. I was helpless. Only a mind

of vast power could reach out here to contact me."

"Mental beams," Rad Marks warned. "They've advanced beyond us." A lock of iron-gray hair fell over his forehead, and he pushed it back impatiently. He didn't look like one of Earth's leading scientists, standing there in his ill-fitting gray uniform. Marks' chest was sunken and his stomach was flabby. He walked on pipestem legs and over everything was the glistening dome that was his bald head. But Marks was satisfied with himself, and showed it. He never let anyone forget that he had invented the Marks space drive.

Cli Andrus said, "I overcame it immediately." He couldn't stop the tiny shiver that ran over him. The cavern contained something that made his senses waver when he recalled it.

"You had a bad dream," Russ Ferry said. He grinned happily, like the adventurer he was. Few things ever disturbed Russ Ferry for long.

"Yes—maybe I did," Andrus said haltingly. He tried to convince himself that it had been a dream. The long trip from the Moon station, during which he had been at the controls almost without sleep, could have thrown him off balance a little. He could have been napping, for just a few seconds. "Yes, of course," he said.

**C**LI ANDRUS knew that his burning desire to land on Mars was influencing his judgment. He couldn't help it. Since he'd been a small boy, lying on a grassy lawn to watch the stars of an evening, his imagination had swept him away. Mars, blazing in the night sky of Earth, thrilled him.

Later, much later, he had taken his dreams with him to Tech, and after that into the Moon Service. A permanent colony had been established on

the Moon in 1974, and Andrus was there. He'd come on one of the early oxygen rockets.

His dream was becoming known, among his close associates, but only Russ Ferry dared to twit him about it. Because Mars, then, was out-of-reach. The oxygen rockets could struggle up a quarter of a million miles to the Moon, but Mars was thirty-five million miles away at its closest approach. A one-way trip was possible, Andrus proved in 1976, only to have the newly formed Earth Council forbid it. They were conservative.

It was not until Rad Marks brought out his space drive that the first interplanetary trip was authorized. Curiously, Marks developed his drive not in the gigantic Council atomic laboratories, but in his own private shop with insignificant facilities. The man was a genius.

By then Andrus commanded the Moon station. It was inevitable that he be given command of the Mars ship, the *Marks I*, that small, eighty-foot tube of compact power.

Rad Marks said, "We'll take no chances. Turn the ship back."

Disregarding the flabby scientist, Andrus gestured at Ferry and said, "Notify Lonas that we're landing in nine hours." Flen Lonas, chief engineer, was the fourth member of the crew.

"We can't let the drive fall into the hands of the Martians," Rad Marks objected bitterly. "You've got your orders, Andrus."

"There ain't no Martians," Russ Ferry derided.

Marks ran to the ship's neo-wave radio. His face distorted in anger. He slapped in a switch, and said, "I'm calling Earth Council. We'll see."

Cli Andrus jumped at him. He shoved Marks away with one swipe of his arm, and the scientist ended up

in a heap on the far side of the control room. Andrus ordered, "Return to your jobs, both of you."

He saw Russ Ferry look at him strangely, but Ferry left the control room.

Rad Marks got up slowly. "If we get back, Andrus," he said viciously, "all Earth will hear of this. You're through, do you hear? *You're through.*"

Andrus watched the man stamp from the room. Marks' dignity had been punctured, and the man had been suppressed rudely. Marks could be a dangerous enemy. He'd require watching.

**T**URNING back to the pilot chair,

Andrus sank into the deep cushions. He thought again of the alien picture that had formed in his mind, and now it seemed like a childish delusion. He had let himself lapse into a daydream, and it got the better of him for the few instants before he awoke. He regretted that he had had to handle Marks roughly, but it was the only way. If Marks had talked to Earth Council, the timid oldsters would have demanded immediate return of the ship.

On the visi-plate the north polar ice cap of Mars filled most of the screen. The ship was dropping fast, almost too fast. Andrus moved a lever. The low whine that had filled the ship since take off rose in pitch.

Eyes watchful, he scanned the dials and meters on the control panel. It would be no easy task to land on Mars. The new drive was powerful, and tricky. Based on the rocket propulsion principle, but with the new, Marks-developed practical atomic power, it spit and muttered from the tubes in the stern. For hours now the drive had been thrusting against Mars' gravity, slowing the ship. It would



land stern first.

Andrus spoke into the intercom, "How is it down there, Flen?" He pictured Flen Lonas, grimy and grease-covered, looking up from his work. Lonas would be filthy; but his engines gleamed.

"Everything on the beam, captain," Lonas' voice came back. "This baby can take it."

"Rad Marks been down there?" Andrus asked.

"No."

"Keep him out until we land."

"Yes sir," Lonas replied.

Andrus relaxed in his chair. He felt a sure, swelling elation, a confidence in his ability to put the ship down safely. There'd be no ground assistance here, but he'd do it alone. The blind landings he had practiced on the Moon, with its low gravity, had given him the necessary experience.

Russ Ferry returned to the control room. "Better watch Rad Marks," he advised. "He sits on his bunk and stares at the bulkhead. When I spoke to him he didn't seem to hear me."

After a moment's thought Andrus said, "He'll be okay, I think. His dignity is a little battered just now. We won't need his help to land. I'll balance her down alone, if necessary."

"You're too damn trustful," Ferry cautioned.

As if on signal, the intercom sprang to life. It amplified the voice of Flen Lonas. "Help!" he screamed.

"Take over," Andrus barked at Ferry. He leaped from the controls, and charged across the room. He flung himself down the steel-walled passageway toward the engines.

At Rad Marks' cubicle, he shot a swift glance in. The flabby scientist was not there. Andrus swore softly. He dropped down a ladder to the lower deck. Barring his way to the engine room was a massive door of six-inch

steel. He threw his weight against it, and bounced back.

A bullet-eye porthole of shatter-proof glass was built into the door. Andrus looked through it, rubbing his shoulder. At first glance he saw no sign of Lonas. The squat black chamber of atomic unit, with its checker-board of damper rods, filled most of his vision. Beyond it were the massive tubes leading into the space drive.

He squeezed close to the glass and looked diagonally toward the Senes panel. Lonas was half under the panel. His face was a shambles of bloody flesh. Over him stood Rad Marks. He smashed a stubby rod down on Lonas as Andrus watched.

CLI ANDRUS beat frantically on the steel which barred him. Marks straightened, and turned toward the door. His gray hair flared out over his head. He smiled, and dropped the rod he was holding.

Andrus wheeled, spurted back up the passage to the nearest intercom station. He snapped it into service and stormed, "For the love of God, Marks, open up."

Marks' voice came back coldly, "Lonas was in my way, but he's not hurt badly. We're turning back, Andrus. Since you won't cooperate, I'm going to jury-rig a set of controls and run the ship from here."

Andrus recognized the hysteria in Marks' voice. The scientist had lost control of himself. He was like some strange being. Was it possible that Martians did exist, and they had taken over Marks' mind?

"Marks," Andrus appealed, "have the Martians reached you?"

Marks laughed raucously. It was the old Marks, the pompous genius. "They got to you, Andrus," he said sarcastically.

"Don't do this thing," Andrus

pleaded. "It's mutiny. For your own good, I ask you—" He stopped and leaned against the metal wall.

There was no answer from the engine room. Andrus did not doubt that Marks could take over. The man had built the key parts of the ship. It would be possible for him to disconnect the forward controls and rig up a temporary set in the engine room. He could drive the ship back toward the Moon, far enough so that when he returned the controls to Andrus the precious plutonium fuel would be nearly exhausted. There would be enough left for a landing, perhaps.

Andrus guessed what had seemed wrong with Marks from the beginning. He remembered the tremendous reluctance Marks had to make the trip. Marks hadn't wanted to risk it. For all his genius and self-confidence, Marks was a coward. His strutting pomposity was a front to cover up a yellow spine. At the first sign of pressure, he had cracked wide open.

Russ Ferry said over the intercom, "I was listening in, Cli. What you going to do?"

"Break in," Andrus answered. "Lonas needs medical care and we've got to get to Marks."

"Okay. What do I do?"

"Keep us on course as long as possible. If Marks disconnects your controls, come down here."

"Yes sir."

Ferry snapped out his words too eagerly, Andrus thought. The dark-faced man didn't seem to be his easy-going self. Andrus dismissed the idea from his mind and turned toward the steel door that barred his way to the engines. Massive bolts fastened it from the inside. A cutting torch would eat through the steel, but the only torch on the ship was inside the engine room.

HE GLANCED through the port-hole in the door. Marks worked furiously inside at the Senes panel. He had laid bare the wiring and jabbed a long lever into the complicated maze. At his feet were two large meters from the panel. He appeared too engrossed in his work to notice Andrus at the door.

Cli Andrus turned away, helplessly. His bare hands were no use against six inches of steel.

After a moment's indecision, he moved fast toward the control room. He made it halfway up the ladder to the high deck, when the ship lurched violently. He was plucked from the ladder and thrown down. He landed on his back. The breath left him in one tremendous gasp.

Through the ship silence crept. After days of soft sputtering, the atomic jets had faded out. Seconds later the familiar whine came back, and the ship bucked as a new hand on the controls threw in power switches.

Andrus picked himself up and climbed the ladder. He disregarded a dull pain in his hip. Marks had succeeded in taking control, he knew. Andrus went swiftly toward the control room. He wanted whatever help Russ Ferry could give.

Ferry was in no condition to help. The man sprawled in the control chair, eyes shut and mouth open. He breathed gently. Andrus grabbed him, shook him furiously.

"Ferry!" he yelled.

Ferry came awake slowly. He blinked his eyes and looked up at Andrus. "Damn," he said, "the dreams you get, sometimes. I thought I was in a big cave on Mars—"

"You had it too?" Andrus interrupted. "Red haze, giant spheres?"

"I—I guess so." Ferry stared straight ahead, avoiding Andrus' eyes. "Maybe—maybe Marks is right," he

said. His voice trembled a little.

Cli Andrus was convinced. He'd known Ferry for years, had never seen anything before that would shake the man like this.

"All right," Andrus said slowly. And it was the end, for him. If they turned back, and reported Martian life to Earth Council, there wouldn't be another flight to Mars in his lifetime. Earth Council would cancel interplanetary plans and even exploration of other planets would be prevented. That meant—Andrus blinked. Another man, hundreds of years in the future, would be the first to reach Mars.

He couldn't go on now, with Ferry's corroborative evidence. It would be violation of his sworn word. Andrus made his decision, and acted promptly. He switched on the intercom, and said, "Marks! We're turning back to the Moon. Come to the control room."

A burst of loud laughter came from Marks, and the man howled, "Trickery won't get you in here."

Andrus tried again, "Ferry had a contact with the Martians. He convinced me. We'll follow the orders Earth Council gave us. Open that engine room, Marks."

Marks hooted again, then his voice faded as if he had moved away from the intercom transmitter.

Ferry asked, "Orders, Cli?"

"Marks may be a genius when he's sane, but now— We've got to get at him, Russ."

"He's just as likely to drive us out around Jupiter as back to the Moon," Ferry suggested.

"No," Andrus disagreed. "That'd be death. And Rad Marks is a coward. He'd get us back to the vicinity of the Moon all right. But any landing will have to be piloted from this room."

"Uh-huh, I see," Ferry said. A frown raced over his face. "No pre-

cision control down there. No visiplate. You mean he'll jam up things so we'll crash on the Moon. We'll be a new little crater with a bit of crumpled metal at the bottom." He paused, then repeated, "A new little crater, and maybe not so little at that."

ANDRUS glanced into the visiplate, which still operated. Mars was closer now, despite the drive which thrust mightily to push the ship away. The canals on the red planet were easily visible. They appeared to be giant canyons, some running parallel and others criss-crossing in a great grid. Andrus sucked in his breath hopelessly.

Russ Ferry gave no sign that he had noticed. He asked, "Can you put things back together after Marks tears them apart?"

"I'll have Lonas to help," Andrus said. He knew he couldn't do it alone. From the brief glimpse he had gotten of Marks at the Senes panel, there appeared to be at least three days of work necessary. It would take four days to return to the vicinity of the Moon.

"Cli," Ferry said, "Can you get through that door with thermal paste?"

Andrus nodded. "I think so."

"There's a can stored in the paint locker," Ferry said.

Andrus left the room fast. He called back over his shoulder hastily, "Come on. I need your help."

He lowered himself down the ladder, ran halfway along the passage, and threw open the cubbyhole door. He rummaged among the gear stored there, all of it lashed or sealed to the walls. The can of paste glared at him from its bright red cannister. He grabbed it.

Ferry caught up with him at the engine-room barrier. Together they

glanced in. Rad Marks crouched near the Senes panel, his back to the door. In front of him were the meters Andrus had seen earlier. Now wires led from them to the panel, and a third control that looked like a black switch handle had been added. Marks had his hand on the black handle.

"I'll talk to him once more," Andrus said. "Smear that door regardless." He watched Ferry open the can, take a trowel and begin spreading the thin gray paste around the door, just inside the hinges. Then he went up the passage to the intercom.

"Marks," he said sharply. "Open up. You can't get away with this."

Andrus knew his voice had boomed into the engine room. Marks must have heard. But there was no response.

He strode back to the door. Ferry was finishing with the paste. "Ignite it," Andrus said grimly. The door was small sacrifice to obtain control of the ship again. Flaring up to a temperature of thirty-five hundred degrees centigrade, thermal paste would cut through steel like a hot torch.

Ferry touched off the paste, and retreated up the passage. Glaring, blinding light sprang up. Waves of heat hit Andrus, and he was forced farther from the door. He shielded his eyes and watched through tight slits between his fingers.

Andrus said, "Get your jacket up over your head, then follow me."

He charged. The edges of the door formed a white-hot oblong. He slammed into the center. Even here the steel was deathly hot. It scorched his uniform jacket and sent sharp pain flooding through him.

The door fell inward under his rush. He leaped over it and sprinted across the engine room toward Rad Marks.

Behind him Russ Ferry shouted, "Take him, Chi."

RAD MARKS rose slowly from a crouching position. The sneer on his lips had a tinge of evil in it. His hands were empty.

Andrus, in split second thought, considered and discarded the possibility that Marks was not helpless. Andrus was superbly confident that he could handle the scientist. He rushed toward Marks.

Something hit him. It felt as if he had run into a solid wall. His muscles relaxed and he wobbled backward like a baby just learning to walk. He fell to the floor.

And through him, in wave after vicious wave of hate, swept a mental beam from Rad Marks. Andrus lost the ability to move. He lay helplessly on the floor, his most intense effort failing to tighten a muscle. A vice seemed to grip his mind, and he was powerless.

Marks was triumphant. His lips did not move, but his thought beat into Andrus' skull, "You die for this, Earthman."

Andrus had lost control of his body but he was still able to think. The wave of mental force was familiar. It was the same as that he had experienced in the pilot's chair. There was no physical pain, simply a sickening revulsion that tortured him.

Andrus tried to move his lips and vocal cords. No sound escaped him. He concentrated his mind on a sheer, single sentence, hoping that Marks would receive it, "You can't land on the Moon without a pilot."

Marks caught the thought, for he responded grandiosely, "Irada Markeen will land alone. No Earthman could match the skill of a Scandoid."

The thought that Andrus had refused to face came back. It was a simple statement, "You're a Martian."

Marks laughed. "Yes."

A mass of thought waves from the

Martian flooded into Andrus' brain. It was like reading a book at a glance. Marks, or Markeen as was his true Martian designation, was a renegade. He had been one of the pitiful remnant which survived from a once mighty Martian civilization. It was a peaceful, resigned remnant, conscious of its glorious past and neglectful of the future. Much of its science had been forgotten. The race neither had, nor wanted, contact with other planets. It was content to die alone.

Into this placid race Irada Markeen had been born. He was a stormy atavism to the great days. Through the long Martian years he had been a rebel, until in a fit of fury, he killed a fellow Martian. The penalty was death. Irada Markeen fled the planet, in a one-man rocket which he constructed himself.

His development of the Marks space drive in his Earth laboratory was no triumph of his. He had copied it from ancient Martian principles.

Cli Andrus sent a thought, "Why?" he asked. "Why did you give the drive to Earth Council. You knew we'd try to reach Mars."

Swiftly, the answer was in his brain. "Fools," Markeen raged. "I demanded that Earth Council colonize Venus first. It was inconceivable that they refuse my advice. I believed that the warlike Earthmen would colonize Venus, develop ships of war, then descend on Mars and wipe out the—" The last was a Martian phrase Andrus could not interpret.

Markeen went on. "When the destination was certain, I had to go along. I must make certain that the trip failed. I—" The thought connection snapped like fragile glass. Without interruption, as if he had cut it off purposely, Markeen said aloud, "I thought you would turn back. It was inconceivable that you would dis-

obey your orders, and try to land. When you kept going, I took over the ship."

ANDRUS knew, from his brief glimpse into the Martian's brain, that Russ Ferry lay nearer the door, helpless. Lonas was somewhere in the room, and the chief engineer was dead. Markeen had murdered him.

Andrus gathered his willpower and fought desperately to move. He sent all his frantic, concentrated desire into an impulse to move his right hand. He tried to raise it from the floor. It was no use. By the sheer power of mental waves, Markeen held him motionless.

The despair that flooded him was real, and his own. It was no thought projection from the Martian. He flashed a thought at Markeen, "If it's death for you on Mars, it'll be death on Earth too after this."

"I'll make explanations," Markeen said. "Ferry killed you and Lonas, but I stopped him when he came after me."

Earth Council would listen, Andrus thought. Any story Marks gave them would be taken as truth. He was above suspicion.

Andrus heard Markeen clumping about on the steel floorplates. The whine of the atomic drive was loud, as more power was fed into the stern tubes. In a matter of minutes, the ship would overcome its momentum toward Mars, hang motionless for an instant, then thrust back toward the Moon. Mars must be close outside.

The idea came to Andrus then. He gagged it savagely, forced it out of his mind. Markeen must get no hint of it.

A few seconds later gravity vanished. Andrus floated up off the floor. Drive had canceled momentum. Only instants the free feeling lasted. Andrus fell back hard.



Markeen stepped into Andrus' range of vision. The Martian's bald head glistened. In his hand was the long, heavy metal lever Andrus had seen before. Marks raised it suggestively, brandished it over Andrus.

CLI ANDRUS made one tremendous effort to move. It was useless. Markeen held him in a mental grip that kept him paralyzed.

"If you had obeyed your orders," Markeen said, "it would have been different."

"We'll get you, Markeen," Andrus thought. "Scum of Mars."

"Die, Earthman," Markeen exploded. He lifted the bar swiftly.

Andrus mobilized his utmost power. He shot a thought out to Mars. All his fear and desperation was behind it, and the terrible mental concentration that he had been gathering for minutes. "Irada Markeen is here," he transmitted.

His thought went out with the speed of light. And the answer, flooding into his mind from a deep Martian cavern, was "Yes!"

Like a spring released, Andrus leaped up. Coming into him was a sweet, powerful emotion. It fought in his mind with the command of Irada Markeen. The treacherous scientist lost.

Markeen brought his bar down fast. Andrus could not avoid it in time. It crashed into his right shoulder. Numbing pain shot through him. He staggered backward. Markeen scrambled after him, raised the bar again.

Andrus knew that the being on Mars could give him no more help. It had canceled out Markeen's paralytic command, but farther than that it

could not go. Markeen was strong enough to resist any attempt to take command of his own mind.

Markeen smashed the bar down. It sped through the space between Andrus' body and left arm. Andrus sprang at Markeen, tried to club the man with his one good arm. The other hung helplessly.

He tripped, and sprawled on the plates at Markeen's feet. Above him the heavy bar started down again. Andrus grabbed for Markeen's legs. He yanked hard, and Markeen hit the floor. Andrus threw his weight on the Martian. He wrested the bar from him, and pounded his head against the steel, not very lightly.

Andrus rose painfully to his feet. Near the door Russ Ferry crouched, a dazed look on his face. Andrus snapped, "You all right, Russ?"

"I—I guess so," Ferry said. He stood up and came over to look at Markeen. "A Martian," he whispered.

"Yes," Andrus said. He looked at the makeshift panel Markeen had assembled. It had no visi-plate, no height gauges. Wires to the Senes panel were a bewildering maze. With Lonas dead, Andrus could not repair it.

Into Cli Andrus' mind came a gentle thought. "Well done," it said. "Bring your ship close to our planet. We will land it and repair your controls. Do not fear us."

Andrus considered. "We'll land," he thought swiftly. "We'll deliver Irada Markeen to you."

He walked to the control room, and looked at Mars in the visi-plate. The red planet lay a thousand miles away. Andrus choked up. He brushed his eyes, and looked again. He'd be touching Mars soon, now.

THE END

# MR. LAHR SAYS HIS PRAYERS

*By Alexander Blade*

HE OPENED his eyes and closed them again. It should be Monday morning. He hadn't heard the alarm. Of course that meant nothing; he might have forgotten to set it. On the other hand the alarm might have gone off and he hadn't heard it. H'm, better not think of that. It meant maybe that it was now Monday night... He sighed and there was an echo. The echo did it. He opened his eyes again. And the echo sighed again...

He turned his head slowly to the left. There was a face beside him, a long lean face, all v's in the lines of the eyebrows and hair and mouth. It was a man's face. Charley Sahr speculated idly on it for a second. It wasn't such a bad face as faces went, and as faces went he wished this one would go. It was a hell of a thing to find lying beside one on a Monday morning or evening, whichever the case was. Now if it were Annabelle's face, Charley sighed again.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," the face said.

"Do what?"

"Scratch my leg with your toes."

"Was that your leg?"

"Yes."

"If you don't like it why don't you take the bony thing out of my bed



then? I didn't order it."

"You invited it *and me* to share your bed and board with you last night."

"I must have been *very* drunk. But *very!*"

"An excuse. Just an excuse. I should be insulted. But I won't."

Charley rolled his eyes upward and watched a fly walk the ceiling. The fly met another and they talked for a while and parted. He thought how sensible flies were. They talked and the talk over, they parted. But not this damned face beside him. Oh, no! It just wanted to lie there and talk...

"Don't you think we ought to be up and away?" He was pleased with the

beautifully delicate way he put it.

"You ought to: You're late for work."

Charley Sahr groaned, gathered his short plump body together and threw it out of bed. He was surprised when it landed on his feet. He gave the face a triumphant look and saw that the face had opened its eyes. They were brown, level and a little sad.

"There's breakfast for you on the kitchen table. Bacon, eggs and coffee. And the brown stuff in the tall glass is my special morning-after reliver. I want you to drink every drop of it. Understand?" the face said.

"Yes, dear," Charley's voice developed feminine overtones.

**Mr. Lahr had never felt compelled to resort to prayer—until the day the trumpet blew for him**



As the soft notes suddenly filled the room he stared at the man opposite—and he looked into another world!...

THE BROWN stuff in the tall glass did wonders. And the coffee, eggs and bacon were just right. It was a new man who walked back into the bedroom forty-five minutes later. The face had disappeared. But there were splashing sounds from the bathroom. The splashing stopped at about the time Charley got the Windsor knot just right. And a moment later a tall man walked into the bedroom. The face had a nice body, lean and sinewy, with wide shoulders shooting away from a deep chest. The legs were bony.

"Your electric shaver is broke," the face announced.

"It was all right yesterday."

"That was yesterday. Better stop off during lunch and get a new one."

"Why you..." Charley began. Then: "Yipe! I'm an hour late."

"That's what I said before..."

"Do I have to kiss you good-bye?" Charley snarled from the doorway.

"Another time," the face said. But the mouth was smiling and the eyes were crinkled in laughter.

And oddly, Charley found his anger gone. He was smiling in return. "See you later," he said. "I like my steaks medium-rare..."

JARVIS FLUMM, city editor of the *Chronicle*, insisted he had the dirtiest job on the paper. Being a shepherd, father confessor and final arbiter at all poker sessions for ten reporters, two rewrite men and two city desk men required virtues only the Gods possessed. Besides that it was his duty to put the paper on the street. Sometimes it was almost too much. Like now for instance.

"...Charley, my boy. How nice of you to come in. But you didn't have to rush. You could have come in *two* hours late. Then you'd have only an hour to go until lunch."

Charley said, "Three hours..."

"What three hours?"

"Three hours and I'd have an hour to work before lunch."

Flumm took several deep breaths, removed his glasses, polished them and placed them on the thin bridge of his nose again. He smiled. Then snarled: "You're fired! Get that fat belly of yours out of here. If there's one thing I don't like it's comedians. Even good ones. And you're..."

"I know, boss. I stink. And I was drunk last night and I'm late and I'm sorry."

"Fine. Three murders, the biggest fire the Loop's had since '71, four aldermen pinched at a bingo game, 'Crazy' Cozzi back in town, and me with three men missing on vacation, and he's sorry. A fat lot of good that is."

"Crazy Cozzi back in town... When?"

Flumm narrowed his eyes. He took in the round face, the protuberant blue eyes, the thinning hair, the rather prominent hooked nose and the full sensuous lips and wondered what had possessed him to give Charley Sahr his old job back. He had been told that Sahr was doing well in the auto racket he had gone into. But then the fat little man had come to him and asked for a job and he had hired him. For no matter what Sahr's failings, and they were many, he was one hell of a good reporter. Flumm decided to re-hire Charley. Only Sahr could handle the Cozzi thing...

"Charley, I'm going to give you one more chance," Flumm said. "If there's one man in this town who knows hoods, it's you. Get to Cozzi and find out what he's doing here, what he wants and who he's seeing. You can write your own ticket on this. Understand?"

"Got it! Any deadline?"

"I'll hold the presses if it's important enough."

THE METROPOLITAN Hotel was a ten-story red brick affair on south Michigan Ave. It had seen palmer days ten years before, when Crazy Cozzi was head of the notorious Syndicate and doing business there. Now it was just another hotel.

A slender man in a beige gabardine suit leaned his back against the bricks to the right of the entrance. His right leg was curled behind him and his foot was tapping the bricks. He had a lean, narrow face and a thin sullen mouth. His eyes missed no one as they passed him.

Charley Sahr went by him, turned and came back. "Slick' Madding. Right?"

"What's it to you?" Madding asked. He took a toothpick from a pocket and put it carefully into a corner of his mouth.

"I heard Crazy's in town. I thought maybe he might see me."

"Why should he see you? What have you got for him?"

"I'm Charley Sahr, with the *Chronicle*. He'd remember me."

"Ohh! A reporter. He's busy."

Charley smiled more widely, turned and followed a girl with his eyes as she strolled by. How nice. Skirts were getting higher again. And sweaters were coming back, too. A finger tapped his shoulder.

"...Room 918," Madding said.

NOTHING HAD changed. The room looked exactly as it had ten years before. The same filing cases, the same desk, the same leather chairs and sofa. Only the men were different, fatter, older, greyer and more prosperous-looking.

The two on the sofa were talking in low tones. They paid no attention to Charley as he walked past. There was a man behind the desk. He was thick-set, dark-haired, turning grey at the temples. His eyes never left Char-

ley's completely unattractive face.

"Hyah, Ralph," Charley said. "Remember me?"

"Yeah. What do you want?"

"Just a few words with Crazy. My boss wants a story. You know, people haven't forgotten..."

"My brother's a sick man. I'll give you whatever you want."

"Just five minutes with him, Ralph. That's all."

"No. Not five seconds. Talk to me."

"Okay, Ralph. Is he taking over again?"

"There's nothing to take over. He's here because this is his home. Does that satisfy you?"

"Sure. But my editor... he's a funny guy. He might not be happy with that. He'd say that isn't news..."

Ralph Cozzi told Charley what the editor could do to make news.

Charley said, "A swell trick if he could do it. Yeah! Well... Can't blame me for trying."

Ralph didn't blame him. The two on the sofa were still deep in their private talk. Charley wondered if they had even noticed him. He thought not. Madding was still keeping the hotel from falling to pieces. The toothpick had changed corners. Otherwise nothing had changed...

JARVIS FLUMM was very happy with the story Charley Sahr did on Cozzi. He said it was the best writing Charley had ever done. Maybe even win an award or something for him. He read a part of it aloud:

"Ralph Cozzi said his brother was sick. An understandable illness. The boy had gone *legitimate*! No wonder he was sick. The city ripe for anything and the boy had gone legitimate. But now Crazy's back. Aah! The good old days, with a corpse on every corner. Hail the good old days. Gone... Well. Slick Madding is at the old stand, holding up the Metropolitan Hotel, and



room 918 is open for business. Maybe the good old days haven't gone far enough...' Fine writing, Charley. Keep it up."

Charley Sahr was pleased with himself. He beamed good naturedly at every passerby as he made for the Newsmen's Nook. This day's work deserves a celebration, he thought. Nothing less...

Murphy, the apron, gave Charley his gold-toothed grin. He wiped the bar in front of the fat little man and said: "How's a the boy? You looka good. Better'n you did 'alasa night. What'll you have, Sharley? Ada usual?"

"Yep, Murph. Double-bourbon and a beer. My boss just promoted me. Says I can sweep out the back room. And he's going to let me keep all the butts I find."

"Always a joke. Asa what I like. How you friend?"

The smile left Charley's face. "What friend?"

"You no 'member? Coulda be all right. Talla man, skinny. He takea you home..."

"Murph. I was pretty drunk last night, wasn't I?"

"Not too bad. So-so."

"How'd I meet this guy?"

Murphy shrugged his shoulders. "I do' know. I come to give you drink an' he there. 'S matter? He roll you?"

"No. No! I was just curious. Okay, Murph. Bring on the libations."

**T**HERE WAS a smell of meat broiling. The odor was coming from the kitchen. Charley stopped on the threshold and peered at the man who was bent over the broiler part of the range, poking at something with the tines of a serving fork.

"Another minute and the steak will be done. Medium rare you said..."

Charley's mouth went slack and a

shudder shook his frame. The character was still there...

"Look, Jack..." he began.

"Lahr Lars Lahr," the other broke in.

"I don't care what it is. Joke's over. It was a yock, but it's over now. Why don't you go home?"

"There was a man here to see you. Ten minutes ago. He left a message. He said, 'The Super-Chief leaves at four. It's healthier in Los Angeles.' I don't think so. Some of it's very damp."

"Yeah, yeah," Charley groaned. "But I got an idea Chicago's gonna get very hot. But very."

"I don't think so. As a matter of fact we're in for a week of fall weather."

"Not for me."

Abruptly the brown eyes were intense and questioning. "Let us eat. I will say a prayer before we do. Come."

Lahr faced the wall, clasped his hands and bowed his head over them. He stood so for a full minute then turned to face Charley, seated at the table.

"They answered me. All will be well. My appointment was confirmed."

But Charley was in no mood for this double-talk. He fiddled with the fork and looked with bitter eyes at the table cloth. There was a gnawing pain in his belly and it wasn't from hunger. Maybe South America would be better. Certainly it would be further.

"You forgot to get the electric shaver."

"Look! This morning it was funny. I appreciate what you've done. But right now I'm not in the mood for it. I'm in..."

"Trouble?"

"But bad."

"Tell me about it."

"Nah. There's nothing you can do."

"And some things I can. Tell me about it."

Charley told him. There was a moment of silence. Then the other said: "Eat. The food will not keep. Go on. Now... You have until four tomorrow afternoon. H'm! Just how will they go about making this town hot for you?"

Charley shook his head. First this Lahr character wanted him to eat. Now he wanted him to talk. "Make up my mind, will you!"

"The food can wait. What will they attempt to do?"

"Well. In the old days there'd be a car tailing me when I left for work in the morning. There'd be maybe three guys in it, one of them with a Tommy gun. I'd stop for a paper and *blooie!* I'd be a headline in the afternoon papers."

"The old days, you say. And now...?"

"There'd be a car tailing me when I left the house in the morning..."

"I see. They would use the same procedure. Very well, Caesar. You asked for my help last night, calling me from the veil of darkness. It has been a very long time since a Caesar called to his family Gods for help..."

"Okay. Don't get nervous. Everything will be all right. I know. I'm Caesar and you're Cleopatra, or maybe Mark Anthony. Right?"

The smile on Lahr's mouth was satiric. His hand swept up and down in a sudden gesture. Thunder filled the room. Lightning flashed. There was an odd odor, as of ozone, and a chill wind came up. As if in a dream Charley Sahr heard the pound of sandaled feet in the measured stomp of a route step, the brazen sound of trumpets, the roar of voiced shouting, "Hail Caesar, mighty Caesar!"

"Stop it!"

His eyes were in focus again. He

looked across at the brown ones meeting his. There was a smile in their depths. "Stop it," Charley said in lower tones.

"Stop what?"

"What you were doing."

"I did nothing."

"You moved your hand across your body and..."

"Yes...?"

Charley snapped his lips together. "Okay. So you did nothing. Are we gonna eat or not?"

"I have eaten. It would be better if you did also."

"Then let me eat."

LAHR HAD been right. The night air had an autumn snap to it. The two men walked slowly toward the paper stand on the corner. Fifty yards behind them a black sedan rolled with motor throttled down to an almost silent throb. The men were unaware of the black sedan on the street behind them.

Just as they reached the corner the sedan sped up until it was travelling at a fast clip when it was level with them. Charley Sahr did not see the ugly snout of a sub-machine gun appear from the rear windows. But his companion did. Lahr's arm knocked Charley to the ground just as the Tommy gun belched a streak of fire toward the two.

The sedan screeched around the corner on whining tires. And a second later there was a terrific crash of metal ripping and after, silence, except for the excited voices of men and women running to the scene.

"They were out to get me," Charley gasped.

Lahr brushed the dust from the other's clothes. "I saw them in time."

"Yeah. You saved my life. I thought they were going to wait till tomorrow."

Lahr's wide shoulders moved in a shrug. "You were wrong," he said.

"They crashed. Let's see who was in the car. Damn it! I hope they were all knocked off."

They were.

"Look! The guy with the Tommy gun in his lap. He was known as the 'Butcher' in the old days. Worked for Crazy Cozzi. So they *were* out after me. I get it. The message they sent was just a deal to make me wait until tomorrow afternoon. They had the car planted, figuring I was bound to leave the house sometime tonight. The lousy rats! To hell with them! I'll write what I want and the *Chronicle* will print it. I'll fight them my way."

Sahr didn't hear his companion say, "...*Our way.*"

**I**T WASN'T until they were in bed that Charley Sahr remembered that his new-found friend had been in the line of fire. He turned to ask him how it was he had escaped. But the other's snores changed his mind. He'd ask Lahr in the morning...

Except that Lahr wasn't there. He had left a note, however. Breakfast was waiting for Charley, the note said. And Lahr would be at the Newsmen's Nook about five in the afternoon...

Flumm's dour face turned grim at the news Charley Sahr gave him. "Who the hell does this ex-con think he is? Maybe he was a big gangster in the old days. And even then we printed what we wanted. If he thinks he can scare us he's crazy. Write what you want."

It was time for lunch by the time Charley finished his story. The phone rang as he was about to leave his desk. It was Lars Lahr. He would meet Charley outside and they would have lunch together. Lahr hung up before Charley could say yes or no.

The two men moved in on either side of him before he even knew they were there. There was an odd similarity about them. They were both

young, slim with an odd trimness. They wore topcoats and their right hands were deep in the pockets of their coats. They didn't say anything. Just moved in close to Charley and nudged him toward a car parked at the curb.

There was no need for words. The circles of the guns they had in their coat pockets pressed sharply at Charley Sahr's thighs.

One of the two opened the rear door and stepped in. The other shoved at Charley with his knee and Charley followed the first. The second man closed the door and said, "Let her ride."

As if by magic the door to the right of the driver opened and a figure slid quickly alongside the man.

"What the..." the man to Charley's left muttered.

"I didn't know you were bringing friends," Lars Lahr said. "They look like nice people. I like them."

Charley gulped: "Lars. They're not friends. And I'm not taking them for a ride. They're taking me."

"I said they looked like nice people. Taking you for a ride, eh? I'm glad I came, then. I want a ride too."

The guns were in the open now. The driver sat bug-eyed, intent on traffic. The man on Charley's right seemed to be the leader. He did all the talking: "Okay, wise guy. So we'll make it a double. Maybe it's better this way."

"Of course! Where are we going?"

"We hate the city. And we figured you would, too. So we're going to the country."

"Excellent. I like these boys, Charley. I'm going to do something for them. Later..."

They stopped by the side of a grove of elms bordering a little-used country road. Lahr was first out of the car. He stretched, yawned and a smile of content broke on his mouth. He stepped aside as the others got out of

the car. The guns covered him and Charley.

"Okay, wise guy. You and your pal march."

**I**T WAS gloomy among the trees.

They marched until they reached an open spot. Charley and his friend suddenly found themselves alone. The three hoods stepped away from them. And now the driver had a gun also.

"Now, Mike?" the driver asked.

"Yeah. Get it over with."

The guns came up leveled at the chests of the two facing them and fingers started to tighten on the triggers. And Lars Lahr lifted his right hand. Charley's mouth was open to let out a yell for help. Instead, he gasped. A sword and shield suddenly was in Lahr's right hand.

The sight of the sword and shield unnerved the hoods. Their fingers seemed paralyzed. But not for long. The instant Lahr took the first step toward them they acted. The guns barked their metallic call to death. But nothing happened. Lahr kept moving toward them. The shield was a bulwark against the bullets.

"His head. In the skull!" the leader of the three yelled.

But Lahr was faster than they. Suddenly he was among them and the sword was a flashing circle of steel. When it stopped swinging Lahr was the only one on his feet. The three lay on the ground. They had gone on their last ride...

Charley looked at the dead men and gagged. He wanted to look away. But their sprawled figures fascinated him.

"...Too bad. They seemed like nice people. Ah, well," Lahr said. "Caesar. I have good news..."

Charley turned to find Lahr at his side. The sword and shield were gone. A pleased smile was on Lahr's lips.

"Y'know," Charley said. "I don't scare easy. But you got me jittery. Jit-

tery? Hell! Any more of this and I'll be fit meat for a psych. I been thinking about you..."

"Not now. This isn't the time for it. Our friends are no longer with us and someone might have heard the sounds of the shooting. Perhaps it would be better if we left."

"Okay. Not now. But I've got a hunch you and me are gonna have a long talk. Better have the right answers."

**"N**ICE OF the boys to leave us transportation," Charley observed. "Anyplace I can drop you off?"

"Yes," Lahr said. "The Metropolitan Hotel."

"The— Why there?"

"There must be a reason these people want you killed. I gather they've had their names in print before. Then why are they so frightened now? Unless, as you pointed out, they are thinking of going into their old business again. And don't want publicity or investigation."

"Smart head you got, my friend," Charley said. He rubbed his chin reflectively. Then: "Maybe I'll send you out on my beat. Swords and shield out of nowhere, a disappearing act the Great Cardini would pay a fortune for, breakfast made without getting out of bed... Yeah. And the best of it all. Being shot and not showing any wounds. Go ahead, pal. I'll be at the office till four."

Charley dropped Lahr off on Wabash Ave. "I suppose it's silly of me to say, take it easy. But I like you. And you're a good cook. Just one thing, Lahr."

"Yes?"

"A little more variety for breakfast. Okay?"

Lahr smiled and made a little bow. Charley suddenly found a word for Lahr's smile. Enigmatic... He waited

until the other turned the corner, then drove on. He had no doubts of Lahr's ability to take care of himself. The memory of the sword and shield returned and Charley became aware of a frightening thing. It had been there all the time but Charley had been engrossed in things closer to himself and had not seen them. Yet he had mentioned them only a moment before.

Maybe some of them could be explained. The breakfast, for example. Lahr might have gotten up before Charley had awakened. Might have. No! They had talked for a couple of minutes in bed, then Charley had brushed his teeth, showered, and gone into the kitchen. The bacon had been crisp and hot... And later: Lahr had gone to the bathroom without passing Charley?

The plump-little man shivered suddenly. The whole thing had been there, and he hadn't seen it. A policeman's whistle broke the spell of fear. Charley had almost driven through a red light. It took some fast talking on Charley's part and the use of his press card. Of course the five dollars he slipped the other might have helped. Charley had no wish to get a ticket. He had an idea the car he was in was hot...

He ditched the car at the south end of the Loop. Ten minutes later he was at the *Chronicle* building. But all desire to work was gone. Instead, the thought that perhaps Murphy, the apron at the Newsman's Nook might have a clue, made Charley pass the building without hesitation.

Murphy was there, and alone, a fact for which Charley was grateful.

"I want you to do me a favor," Charley said after ordering his favorite drink, a double-bourdon and beer for a chaser.

"I'm broke today, Sharley," Murphy said.

"Nah, nah! No money. I want you to try and remember everything that happened Sunday night."

"Well... I comea to work..."

"To me, not to you."

"Ho! Hokay. You comea in about seven-thirty. Alone. No Annabella thisa time. You drink like a-always. Then you starta talking how you wasa in the car business. You keepa saying how C. Sahr was the greatest man in the world. Ana someone say, 'Honly ina Rome.' Everybody laugh. Evena you. Ana, you say how you needa help. Everybodya stab you in the back. Youa, C. Sahr..."

"Then?"

"I getta busy. Ana when I comea back thisa man wasa sitting with you. Thasa all, Sharley."

Charley stopped thinking. He was afraid to think. There were some things you don't want to think about...

**C**HARLEY SAHR was quite drunk when Lahr came back.

"Well, here comes old Lahr. Y'know, pal, we'd have made a great combo in the old days, Lahr and Sahr, for your car. Whee!"

But Lahr was too wrapped up in what he had discovered. "Come. There is no time to be lost. You have waited a long time for this moment."

"Aw, no. First do that now you're here, now you ain't trick, Lahr, my buddy-buddy."

Lahr sniffed loudly, frowned, and took the situation in hand. Both of them. Charley was propelled from the place with the dispatch of a drunk being given the rush by a bouncer. There was a car at the curb. Lahr didn't bother explaining where he got the car. He shoved Charley into the front seat and got behind the wheel; and drove off.

He stopped the car before the Metropolitan Hotel. Charley smiled in



drunken amiability and started to get out. But Lahr stopped him.

"Look at me," he said softly.

Charley, grinned and did as the other asked. There were murky depths in the brown eyes, depths within depths. And presently Charley was no longer drunk.

"That's better. We are going to see an old friend. There will be others there. The Gods made me your household Lahr. I failed you once. And they gave me another chance. I will not fail you now. They were talking of how to betray you. I heard them. You will also hear them."

"Fine, fine," Charley said. "That's the ticket. All I want's the lowdown."

Slick Madding was not at his stand. Charley looked at Lahr as they walked into the hotel. Lahr merely smiled. But Charley knew Madding had been taken care of. They took the elevator to the ninth floor and got off. There wasn't even the usual guard in front of the room.

There were four men in the room. Charley recognized three of them instantly. The fourth puzzled him. Then the light broke. Crazy Cozzi. Ten years in the Federal pen had changed him, and aged him. And the sickness he had had altered him completely. He was thin, yellow-faced, slack-bodied. He was sitting where his brother had sat when Charley had first seen him the day before. Ralph was on the sofa talking to the two men who had been there before.

They seemed not to see Charley and Lahr...

Ralph turned to his brother: "The boys say they want in. But they say we're gonna have trouble."

Crazy Cozzi's voice was a hoarse wheeze: "Trouble? What trouble? We got the fixers, an' we got the dough. Only thing I don't like is this Sahr. C. Sahr. Huh? A wise guy. I don't like

wise guys. Too many of them. I'll show them..."

**T**HIS WASN'T the Crazy Cozzi Charley had memory of. This was a broken old man, ill of an incurable disease, used as a figurehead by his brother.

"Cassius the younger," a voice breathed in Charley's ear.

"Yeah," Ralph said. "But we took care of him. Too bad about the Butcher. We'll give him a good funeral. Okay, fellas. I'll get hold of the boys out of town. I'll leave Chicago to you. Figure a week and we'll be ready to run again. Right?"

The others shook their heads, got up from the sofa, straightened their clothes and left the room. One of them passed Charley so close Charley was tempted to light the man's cigarette as he paused.

Then there was no one else in the room but the two brothers.

"Jerks!" Ralph said. He smiled slyly. "But we can use them for awhile. Then..."

"Wise guys," the man behind the desk said. "Too many of them. Got to get rid of them."

"Don't worry. We will. We always did. Right from the beginning. A shot in the back of the head, a knife in the back."

"As you did to Caesar!" a voice called. "But Caesar has returned."

Charley saw Ralph Cozzi turn. And this time Charley knew something was wrong. Charley had taken his eyes from the man for a second at the sound of Lahr's voice. Now Ralph looked different. So did his elder brother. They were dressed in togas and circlets of metal were about their foreheads.

Ralph's hand flashed beneath his toga. When it reappeared there was a thin-bladed knife in it. He leaped for-

ward. And Charley knew he was visible again. His own hand went inside his toga and came out with a blade.

"Cassius," Charley shouted. "Come, Cassius, friend!"

He hadn't meant that. But there was no time for wonder or speculation. About togas, knives or the calling of strange names. He had time only for a quick parry of the thrusting blade and a pivot as the other came on again. Then Charley thrust straight and true. The other folded over the steel buried in his heart, turned his eyes up and fell to the floor. The toga was no longer white. It was crimson from hem to neck...

The man behind the desk was sitting there still. Words of fear babbled from his lips: "No. No. I didn't mean to, mighty Caesar. I was your friend. They made me..."

The bloody blade stopped the words on a gurgling note. And tumbled him forward in a heap across the desk....

"THE CENTURIES were long, mighty Caesar," a voice said. "But the wait was worth it. Caesar is revenged."

Lar Lahr was at his side, face turned toward the man bent over the desk. Charley looked away quickly from the sprawled body before him in a huge pool of blood.

"They-re-they-re dead," he mumbled. "Both of them. I killed them."

"Nonsense," Lahr spoke matter-of-factly. "They were killed by their friends before they left. Obviously. Now you will go and write how they tried to divide the city into sections of rule. Three parts, as Gaul was divided. It will come as a shock to you when you will hear of their deaths."

\* \* \*

Lahr was waiting for Charley. The plump face had lines of weariness etched in it.

"Lahr," Charley said. "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

The other smiled, wrestled a chair close to the sofa and faced Charley.

"I want answers. The right ones. How did you meet me?"

"Did your editor like the story?" Lahr said.

"Loved it. But let's not get away from things. Answer me, Lahr."

"You called to me," Lahr said gravely. "I answered."

"I called to you, huh. What did I say?"

"You said, 'I had the world by the tail. Caesar had the world by the tail and my buddies stuck it in me when I needed them. A guy needs friends.'"

"So you came along. But what made you think I was the one?"

"You took a card from your pocket. Your name was on it, Caesar."

"Not Caesar. C. Sahr. 'Want a car — C. Sahr'. That's what the card said."

"Oh-h!" Lahr made it sound like an apology. "An error, then. But I have helped you."

"Who are you?" Charley asked.

"You are hungry. Wait and I'll get some coffee for us," Lahr said.

Charley waited until he thought the other was taking a hell of a long time just pouring coffee. He got up, walked into the kitchen. It was empty. Charley stared with frightened eyes at the opposite wall. Light from the overhead fixture reflected on something on the porcelain table. He moved to it and looked down at the object.

It was a coin. A bronze coin. There were Latin characters encircling a head. The head was that of a plump-faced man, whose hair was thinned to almost complete baldness, whose eyes were protuberant, whose nose was prominent and hooked and whose mouth was sensual and full.

C. Sahr. Caesar....

# MAN IS THE MEASURE



by H. R. STANTON



**N**EXT TO the science-fictioneer, the architect is the most familiar prognosticator of the future. In fact when we think of the future probably the first thing that comes to mind is the vivid image of lacy, towering cities, built in the ultra-modern style. Architects have been in the forefront of those people who believe in functional design.

The architectural world is following attentively the work of the Swiss, Le Corbusier, whose structures are so renowned in France. Right now, in Marseille, Le Corbusier, is constructing a vast housing project on the waterfront. This modern creation is a vast apartment building with self contained shopping units, recreation units, and so on.

But that isn't what makes it particularly interesting for our own housing projects have long followed this scheme.

It is the way in which the apartments were designed that is so intriguing. Le Corbusier, in his design, has refused to use the meter, or the yard as his system of measurement!

Instead he has devised a system based on human measurements. He calls the system the "modular."

The modular method of measurement considers that since the apartments are built to live in, the most important dimensions are those of the human body and consequently everything should be based on such dimensions.

The ideal height of a man, about an inch or two under six-feet, is one unit of the "modular." Another is the distance one hundred and thirty centimeters—the averaged distance from the navel to the floor!

There are more but these weird—apparently—dimensions are actually very sensible and it is likely that they'll be used for further work. The architect of the future more and more will take into account the fact dwelling place shapes and sizes are—or should be—determined by the people who occupy them. Then people won't have to worry whether the doors are wide enough or whether the kitchen sinks are high enough. In general the house is fitted to the occupant—not vice versa.

It seems a little funny though. If we're not careful technicians might be making measurements in terms of "the span of my hand," or "a thumb's thickness from here to here," "or four arms long!"



# THEORY LEADS TO FACT!



by CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT



**I**N ALMOST all fields of technology the speed with which a problem is solved depends directly on the need for the solution. The classic example is the atomic bomb of course. We possessed the theory—we needed the fact. Men and materials, directed and mobilized, produced the answer in a few short years.

On a lesser scale and with less important items, the same technique works. Consider the matter of spectrographs. A spectrograph is a machine which is capable of analyzing the flame or light of a substance into its chemical constituents. It is one of the hottest things in present-day chemistry. The old methods of laboratory analysis, with flasks and beakers and burners and Rube Goldberg set-ups of apparatus are gradually disappearing because the spectrograph can provide the analysis infinitely faster. All you do is heat the specimen, pass the emanating light through the spectrograph—and there's your answer.

The spectrograph depends for operation—in order to split up a beam of light—not on a triangular prism such as Newton used in the first spectroscope, but on a piece of glass whose surface has been scratched into a series of parallel lines about twenty-five thousand to the inch. These "gratings" as they are called

are very difficult to make, being ruled or scribed in a special machine in a constant temperature room. Even then more imperfect ones are made than perfect ones.

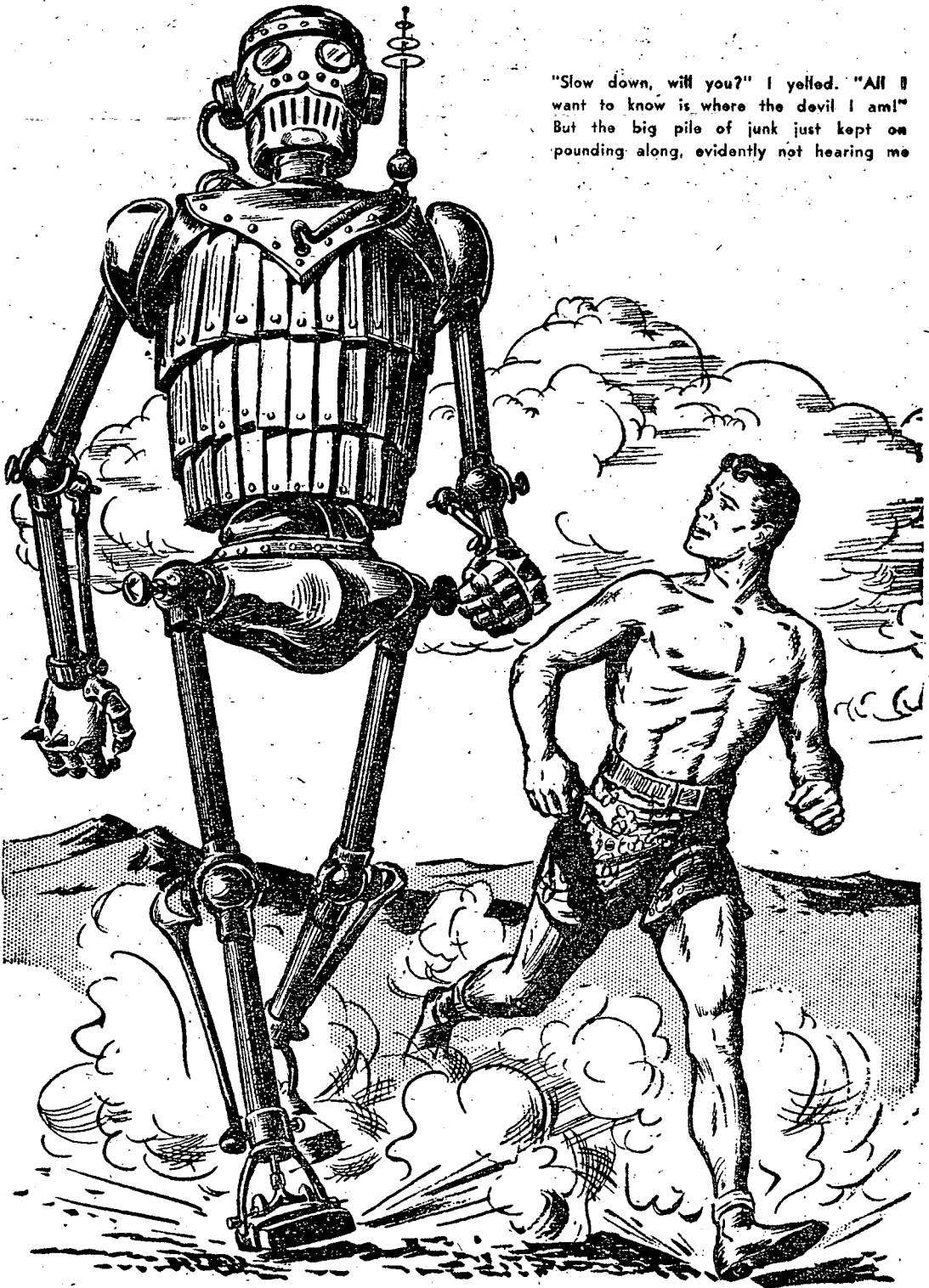
The physicist John Strong, a well known instrument man, has designed a machine which can now produce these gratings at a comparatively rapid rate to meet the world's unprecedented demand for spectroscopes and spectrographs. And the machine offers every possibility for making even bigger and better gratings than before.

This law of "supply and demand" which affects the technological world just as much as the economic one, shows itself continually. We've cited the atomic bomb and this grating machine, but almost anything can be taken as an example. During the manufacture of the bomb, there was a tremendous need for very fine meshed nickel screens. Hitherto they'd not been produced in quantity. In fact their production appeared impossible—but that was only temporary. Shortly after the need arose, the technicians stepped in with the answer. Now you can get small meshed screens in almost any quantity.

When the chips are down, science comes across!



"Slow down, will you?" I yelled. "All I want to know is where the devil I am!" But the big pile of junk just kept on pounding along, evidently not hearing me



# The Country Beyond the Curve

*By Walt Sheldon*

**It was a hell of a country, Tony learned.  
Half the people were crazy, the rest were  
robots—and the girls wanted to wrestle!**

THE WALLS were faced with marble—or more likely a fine plastic imitation. The whole vestibule of this huge office building reminded me of a tomb. I'd seen tombs digging around in the ruins of New York, London, and other ancient sites.

The place made my skin crawl.

At the directory, which bore the heading: BUREAU OF SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGY; I stood awhile letting my eye trail down the list of names until I found the one I was looking for. The white letters stared back at me in a mute, unfriendly way:

*Dr. Petrius Corput  
Chairman, Planning Board  
Room 2612*

For the hundredth time that day, I wanted to turn back. But of course, I couldn't. I still had a damned, primitive, inconvenient sense of decency in me somewhere.

Corput was the man who had been

signing my allowance checks, and these checks made me one of the few people in the world who could go where he wanted and do what he pleased. I'd wondered—but hadn't questioned too much—why the checks came. And I'd made good use of them, at least as far as my particular idea of pleasure went. Now, at the age of twenty-seven, I'd done a thousand and one fascinating things. I'd roped wild cattle on the long-deserted continental plains, I'd flown jets over the lonely Pacific, I'd left a trail of bent, if not broken, hearts in a dozen airport cities, and I'd poked about, wearing a Geiger-suit, in the nightmarish, radioactive stillness of the New Mexico preserve.

I had a queer feeling today all this was going to stop; all this and the allowance checks. But I didn't know for sure—I couldn't know, because I never met Dr. Petrius Corput the man who had made it possible.

I took the automatic elevator and pressed the button for the twenty-



sixth floor. The doors shut themselves with machined finality. Things whirled. My skin kept crawling.

Maybe it was just the city itself that made me this way. Sometimes cities were beautiful: perhaps in moments when the sun struck their stainless steel towers in the right way, or when the bustle and motion in their streets had the strange, discordant beauty of atonal music—but for the most part, I avoided them. I preferred open places. I preferred open places and simple people, those who never worked too hard or desperately at any one thing, and consequently had no Office of Occupational Control specialty rating. I had none myself.

The doors opened at the twenty-sixth floor. 2612 was directly across the hall; I went there, opened the door, and walked in. There was a pine-paneled reception room before me, and behind a little office fence a secretary sat printtyping on an electric micro-filmer.

**S**HE LOOKED up as I came in. After that I didn't really notice anything else in the room. She wasn't exactly beautiful—not in the way a colordak model would be, but—well—there was something about her. She was a red-head. She had wide cheekbones, widely set eyes, and a strong, open look; her lips were rather broad and they looked warm. Her office frock covered her breasts in the old-fashioned, Twentieth Century way, but on her it looked only more exciting—not at all prudish.

I grinned at her. "You don't belong here. Still—glad I found you. The joint was beginning to give the galloping gloom."

There was plenty of no-nonsense in her voice as she answered. Polite as a polished diamond, and as hard. "You wanted to see someone here, sir?"

"Dr. Corput."

Her brows moved a little: clearly, Corput was a big man in these parts. "Your name?"

"Faulkner. Tony Faulkner."

She pulled a printed form toward her and jotted in it. She looked up. "Specialty?"

I said, "What?"

"I have to write your name, specialty and citizen's serial number, and the time you arrived, and the time you go. It's a rule."

"Oh," I said. I scratched my cheek. "Well, I don't exactly have a specialty."

She looked stern. Probably thought I was trying to kid her. "Surely, Mr. Faulkner," she said, "you've been given a specialty rating by the Office of Occupational Control."

"Well—yes," I said. "Put me down as Class Twelve."

"Class *Twelve*?" Her eyebrows went up. Way up. She stared at me. I could guess why: only the very hopeless were put in Class Twelve—only the very hopeless, or the very loose-footed and unattached, like me.

I said, "Look, honey, if you'll just call Dr. Corput, maybe sometime he can explain the whole thing to you. Matter of fact, I'm hoping he'll do a little explaining for me. He's expecting me."

"All right," she said, lifting her wristcom to her face, "I'll do that. Only the name's Della O'Brian, not honey. *Miss* O'Brian to the likes of you."

"Okay, honey," I said, and kept grinning.

She made the announcement and almost immediately I heard Dr. Petrius Corput's voice boom back: "Well, send him in!" She looked a little surprised, but got up, beckoned and told me to come on. We went through halls. I was too busy watching Della O'Brian walk in front of me to notice much about them.

And then, a few moments later, I was shown into a room. I had expected it to be an office. It wasn't. It was—well, it might have looked like an operating room except for the electronic control racks and curious reflector stands grouped about the adjustable table in the middle. There were several men in here, perhaps six; but at the moment I didn't get a chance to look at them because the man I knew to be Dr. Corput was already coming my way—looming at me. He was big. He was about fifty, handsome in a red-faced way. He wore a short-sleeved lab coat, and I saw that his arms were muscular and covered with ginger-colored hair. There was only a fringe of this hair on his head; he was mostly bald.

"Well, well, Tony!" he said, holding out a big, moist hand for me to take. "We're glad to see you! Glad you got here, Tony!"

Don't ask me why a chill suddenly went along my spine. Maybe his cordiality suggested the manager of an abattoir watching a new batch of lambs come in for slaughter. Me, lamb. I said, "You're—Dr. Corput?"

"I am, indeed." He was obviously proud of it. He had my arm, now, and there was just enough pressure to let me know he was strong. Well, that was okay: so was I—it was a kind of satisfaction to see he couldn't get his fingers all the way around my bicep when I bulged it. He gestured. "Come on over here, Tony, and we'll try to explain all these things you must be wondering about. Right over here where everybody can get a good look at you."

SO I WENT over there, and there was a swivel chair, and I sat down and everybody had a good look at me. There were introductions. Dr. Parkland. Dr. Croats. Dr. Henry. Others—I think there was only one plain

"Mister" in the bunch.

"Now, Tony," said Corput, after that was over and I had a cigarette going, "we want to get to our experiment with you as quickly as possible, but it's only fair you should know the whole story first."

"Experiment?"

Dr. Corput rubbed his hands. He started to pace—as if he were addressing an amphitheater full of students. Out of dim memory I remembered reading about Petrius Corput somewhere...brilliant man...a biochemist, psychiatrist and skilled surgeon...very unusual to qualify in all three fields...he'd spoken before World Congress on behalf of mercy-killing, which was then a bill. "What," he'd asked, "if it does lead to a few unjust killings? There are too many people in the world, anyway." Now I remembered.

"Tony," he said, "you must have wondered about the allowance checks you've received every month for the past six years. I can tell you at last that those funds came from a special allotment to our own Bureau of Sociopsychology. The amount was carefully determined, so that you couldn't loaf completely, but could still wander from place to place, seeing and doing new things. And we weren't wrong about you; because you performed admirably. The whole thing couldn't have worked out better."

"Wait a minute," I said, frowning, "what do you mean you weren't wrong about me?"

"You were picked for the assignment. You may not even remember the tests—we sent them to every major school. We used them, plus the genealogies in the Office of Eugenics. This was nine years ago. We gathered the data on almost every eighteen-year-old college youth in the world, and had a punch-card machine do our selecting."

"I don't understand. What kind of data?"

"General aptitude is the word that best covers it, I suppose," said Corput. "We looked for the most naturally versatile youth we could find. You were it. Naturally we couldn't tell you the plan—that would have affected your behavior beyond scientific control."

I said, "Doc, this gets mysterious and mysterious. What behavior do you mean?"

He kept pacing, gesturing. "Well, Tony, as you know almost everybody is a specialist today—the veriest journeyman is really remarkably good at what he does. Take a typist. Back in the last century, around the time of the Atomic War, the world typing record was one hundred seventy words a minute. It stood there for nearly fifty years. Today a typist—operating a more complicated printyper, at that—can't even get a job card unless he does one-seventy consistently, with less than ten percent error. That's because typists today spend their lifetimes becoming proficient. Only occasionally do we find anybody with two specialties—seldom with three, except, uh—" he coughed with not-very modest modesty—"in higher levels of scientific institutions such as this one. However, the point is, that this trend to specialization has made for very efficient world production and social management."

"Sure," I said, "I know all that. Frankly, the whole idea's made me itch for years. Itch and squirm."

**H**E LAUGHED. Boomingly. He rubbed his hands again. "Of course it has. That's your nature, Tony: your whole psychological and glandular set-up points to it. In a way, you're an atavism. You might have fitted better in the Leisure Period of the last century, or the old

Renaissance. But no matter. For the last six years we've let you go your way, learning only what interested you. We've kept track of you. You're proficient—though not as much as a specialist—in jet piloting, marksmanship, boxing, wrestling, electrical engineering, portrait painting—several other fairly improbable fields. You could have worked professionally at any of them a hundred years ago. Today, Tony, I doubt if you could get a job card in what we class a skilled specialty. Right?"

I laughed and said, "Well, if I had to make a living I might be a bank robber."

Corput shook his head. "They're the most specialized of all."

"Okay," I said, "so I'm a bum. I specialize in being a bum. What happens now?"

"Your rebirth, Tony," said Corput, slowly. "At least—that's what we hope will happen."

I said, "Come again?"

He turned, then, and pointed to the thing like an operating table I'd noticed before. I saw now that cables ran from the table to the nearby racks, and others from there, presumably, to power sources. "This probably looks rather polyglot," said Corput, "and as a matter of fact it is. That's because in spite of the efficiency of specialization in society, we here must work on a higher plane. Monistically, you understand. Take aptitudes. They used to be primarily a study for psychologists, but our work has led us through psychology, biochemistry, endocrinology, genealogy, surgery, and, in the development of this apparatus, even astrophysics."

I said, "Uh huh."

He was beaming like a steel furnace now. "We think we've now reached the point where we can make a specialist out of anybody *at will*. We think we're going to develop a

method to steer a human being into any one of a number of aptitudes. Control the thing: eliminate random individual choice and plan our production force down to the last farmer or mechanic. That's why we let you develop the way you did, Tony. A jack of all trades—yet with a good I. Q. *Because, Tony, if we can find out how to make an absolute specialist out of you—we can do it with anybody!*"

**I**T TOOK a good, raw second for it to sink in. I got up and said, "Hey—hold on. I like the way I am. I don't want to be a specialist in a mental or any other kind of a cubby-hole. You said yourself that on your level a fellow has to branch out and—"

"You don't understand, Tony. We're offering you a place in history. If our method is perfected it means absolute social and economic control for the first time. Too many farm products because there are too many farmers? Okay—we make mechanics of them—or whatever is most needed. Can you begin to grasp the potentialities of this thing?"

I felt a little dazed. I said, "A fat lot of good a place in history's going to do me if nobody but a history specialist ever hears about it."

That struck all of them very funny. They laughed. They nudged each other. Dr. Corput said, "You're reducing it to absurdity, of course. Actually it won't be that bad at all. In the first place the treatment is much too complicated and expensive. It embodies psychology, surgery, and oddly enough a kind of radiotherapy. I won't go into details, but roughly it's based on the steroid output of the adrenal cortex. When normal people concentrate the output increases—but in mentally sick persons that doesn't happen. The steroids are the key to glandular special-

ization; you see. We've determined their complicated nature to a fine degree. We've found a direct correlation, for instance, between artistic aptitude and the amount of the seventeen-hydroxy, eleven-dehydro-corticosterone group the cortex produces. We've been able to synthesize most of these steroids. Do you follow?"

"My chemistry's a little forgotten, but I'm hanging on," I said. "Go on."

"Well, at any rate, these steroids, in varying amounts and relationships, determine a person's ability to concentrate on one subject. Or, in other words, his aptitude. However it's not quite as simple as merely giving someone an injection of a particular compound. We have to go through a delicate, involved process." He looked up at the ceiling, just a bit dreamily at this point. "We *do* suspect that there is a master reagent—a compound which would make any of the others work by simple injection. That would explain the basic keto groups at the molecular position of seventeen in all of the steroids. If we ever found this one formula we could treat the entire population of the world almost overnight. As it is, we'll have to confine ourselves to a relatively few."

"Look," I said, "all this is very interesting. But what I'd really like to know is—what's going to happen to me?"

He laughed. "Well, frankly we aren't one hundred percent sure. You're the first subject of the experiment, after all. But if everything goes right—and you consent, which I'm sure you will—you will undergo on that table a coordinated treatment of glandular surgery, chemical and ray therapy."

"And if something goes wrong?"

He shrugged. "Something can always go wrong. You could have killed yourself roping wild cattle. Certainly that shouldn't be allowed to deter us."

Maybe my steroids were mixed up with my thinking currents, or something. Maybe it was that silly primordial sense of fairness and equability. I don't know. After all these characters had given me, on a silver platter, a lovely time for the last six years. And I supposed, in a vague way, one ought to do what one can for the march of human knowledge, and that sort of thing.

Anyway, I consented. Against a queer, quiet, instinctive little voice in the bottom of my brain I consented.

AND SO, less than two hours later, there I lay on that operating table thing with the gleaming concave gadgets and the curved baskets and arms and supports and antennae staring at me from above. I was stripped to my shorts, shoes and money belt. They'd wanted me to remove those last two items, too, but I'd said nothing doing. Shoes and money belt had saved my life too many times in too many out of the way places for me to part with them very often. With shoes you could always walk. With a money belt you could always buy something—your life, maybe—and in my case you could always smoke, because I kept a pack of cigarettes in the money belt along with a wallet of important papers, a scratch pad, a pencil, a razor blade and a hairpin. Indispensable items.

Corput was gibbering away at me, now. "There'll be no need for an anaesthetic in the ordinary sense," he was saying. "The mutational ray bombardment will serve the secondary purpose of anaesthesia. You won't feel a thing—nor any after-effects."

I said, "I don't like the sound of 'mutational rays' whatever they are."

"Now, now stop worrying. They're just part of the ordinary cosmic bombardment you receive every day; we pick them up, so to speak, select-

ed and concentrated on the roof. Relax, now, Tony. It's important that you relax."

"With mutational rays getting tossed in my face I should relax?"

"I tell you, they can't harm you. And remember—you may allow us some day to find that basic keto compound, and then we won't have to bother with all this other stuff."

I said, "Wait till the guinea pig union finds I'm doing this for free. Go ahead, Doc, do your doggondest." And that quiet voice way in the depths kept trying to tell me not to.

"Here we go," said Corput. He signaled with his hand.

There was a blur of things moving over me, around me; things gleaming, things humming and after a while things in the air that weren't quite-things. Voices came in fragments. "Point six on the vernier." "All right, you can mesh now." "Careful with your current, there." "Hey—watch your shielding!"

The world began to smell of antiseptic and scorched ozone.

I floated.

I swirled; I tumbled end over end in space and time. Somewhere. It was not unconsciousness, although none of my senses seemed to function, and I had no real control over my thinking. It wasn't blackness—all along it was a kind of deep, dark curtain of gray...

## CHAPTER II

### ROBOTS AND WRESTLERS

IT WAS later. I don't know whether

I opened my eyes, or whether they were already open and the power of sight returned to them. I knew that through all the grayness I had kept hearing voices: only I couldn't remember now what they'd been saying.

I had a funny impression that at one point I'd heard Dr. Corput cry



out: "No—for Pete's sake—not *that* much power!" But I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure of anything.

And now there was nothing but a vast blue sky above me.

I blinked. Queer. It was silent all around me; tomb-silent. The air was still. The sun was warm, and I was lying on my back.

"A dream? A crazy dream?" I asked myself aloud. And with that, I had the idea that I wasn't speaking English—even though I understood myself perfectly well.

The warmth was on my right cheek; I turned toward it. The sun looked larger and redder than it ought to be. Optical illusion, no doubt. Only—and here the idea hit me for the first time—what in blazes was I *doing out-doors?*

I rose to my elbows. I was on a great plain, a slightly rolling expanse of bronze soil and clumps of hard grass. Very dry, all of it; dry and warm. It could have been the American west, or the Australian desert—even parts of North Africa.

I said, "What the hell." Again that feeling of a strange language in my words.

I shook my head, then, got to my feet, and brushed myself off. I was still in my shorts. I looked all around. This broad plain was evidently part of a valley; craggy mountains bordered it. Here and there were weird, eroded rocks and boulders, flat-topped mesas. But there was greenery near the mountains—there'd be water and probably some inhabitants there.

*But what the devil was I doing here: what had happened?*

I said, "Well, no use just standing."

I would have given anything for a cigarette.

I took two steps and said, "Whoa."

A cigarette. Of course—in my money belt. My shipwreck pack, as I called it. Only this time, I kept

thinking and feeling, I must be more than just shipwrecked. Something was certainly out of whack somewhere.

The first few drags of the cigarette made me feel better—though hardly more enlightened.

I started again toward the foothills.

Then I saw movement from the corner of my eye. To the right. Startled, I turned my head. I saw a man's figure walking slowly over a slight rise, scarcely a hundred yards away. His back was turned, he was moving from me.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Hey!"

He didn't look around; he kept walking.

Of all the stupid luck, I thought, I find somebody—and he's deaf. I yelled, "Hey!" again and ran after him.

IT TOOK me only a few steps to find out that the man was walking with incredible speed. He was walking—I was running—and barely overtaking him. I sprinted, then. He seemed to be heading the length of the valley, ignoring the foothills and greenery to either side. I kept after him, yelled, "Hey!" a fourth time, and he pushed on. There was something purposeful and stiffly rhythmic about his stride. Something mechanical—

A few yards later I saw that more than his stride was mechanical. He wasn't a man: not a flesh-and-blood type man, anyway.

I caught up with him. It. Whatever. He was made of dull metal arranged in narrow, overlapping plates, like old Roman armor. I trotted beside him, staring. His face was flat, expressionless, just two lenses in place of eyes, a patch of grill work where the mouth should have been, no nose. No sound—just the heavy pounding of his feet. His arms swung for balance, as a man's might have, but they ended in metal claws, not hands.

I kept with him, and I guess I stared for quite a while. It was too much for me—I couldn't even feel routine astonishment. Just a kind of dull wonder. I'd seen robots—or what were called robots—before, but never in such humanoid form. Robots were usually machines made for a special purpose: as a matter of fact they were trying to do that with people, too, now that I thought of it. Anyway, if robots moved at all, they usually moved on wheels, and there would be hardly a point in having a robot like this—unless it was the result of somebody's whimsy.

"Hey—can't you hear?" I asked.

He kept walking, relentlessly, staring ahead with blind lenses. I touched him. The metal was cool in the shade, warm in the sun; it had a rough, crackle finish. I grabbed the swinging arm and tried to stop it: it swung from my grasp.

I was getting tired, moving at this pace and trying to keep up with him.

Suddenly he started to run. Fast. He equalled my best time in a sprint, and kept it up. After a few yards I was exhausted. I let him go. I stood there, baffled, and watched him pound away kicking up little clods of arid soil. I stood there until he became small with distance and disappeared over a rise.

I shook my head slowly, bewilderedly, and then sat down to rest. I wanted another cigarette, but I was also thirsty, and decided I'd get water first. I sat until I stopped puffing, and until my heart stopped hammering at my chest.

Apparently I was nearer the foothills, now. The eroded rock shapes—some big as houses—were thicker here. I looked around. There was something not quite right about them. As I remembered western rocks they were red, yellow, ochre. These were bluish, with occasional touches of green. Just

a quick impression, but it gave me vague stirrings of discomfort.

I got up then and started to move on—

A girl stepped from behind the nearest rock.

She wore nothing.

Well, it seemed that way to my first startled glance. I stood there, more or less paralyzed with astonishment, and she walked toward me. She was blonde—pale, silvery blonde. Her skin however was quite tan. She was tall, and she moved with all the strong, quiet grace of a lioness. Something queerly familiar about her. Couldn't put my finger on it. As she came nearer I saw that she wasn't actually naked, but wore a brief, skin-tight garment about the color of her own flesh.

Her eyes were dark; they were right on me, and she wasn't smiling.

I said, "Hello."

She stopped. She looked me up and down. She folded her arms. "Like to wrestle?" she said.

I said, "What?"

"Wrestle. I haven't had a decent adventure all day."

NOW, IT'S A funny thing: you're a normal, red-blooded young man with more than just a passing interest in the opposite sex; you treat yourself every once in a while to delightful fantasies, such as beautiful, half-nude blondes asking you if you want to wrestle—and then when something like that actually happens, you just stare, unable to do or say anything.

"What's the matter?" she asked, "Has the gorgol got your tongue?"

I said, "I—I—I—"

"And where did you get those pants?" My secret vice, my dazzling shorts, splattered with hibisci. She nodded at them. "Steal 'em from some tech?"

"Er—I—uh," I said. Funny, I had

the feeling neither of us spoke the same language, yet understood each other.

"Well, come on," she said, "let's get it over with. Might be good for a spot-quickie, anyway."

"Spot-quickie?" But she was already coming toward me. She was in a wrestler's crouch; she looked good. I said, "Now wait a minute," and then she was upon me.

I never had a chance. Not just the element of surprise; either: she'd have been good if I'd been expecting it. She got my arm into a beautiful lock, spun me over her outthrust knee, and threw me. I hit the ground hard. I came up again and tried to say, "Hey," and then found myself sailing over her shoulder. Whump! The ground again. She was on me before I could get up. She twisted my right arm into the small of my back, and then rolled me to the side so that I pinned down my own left arm.

I felt her fingers on the back of my neck. They seemed to search for a moment. Suddenly terrible pain shot like hot steel under my skull, numbing my brain. She'd found a nerve of some kind—one I didn't even know about. The kid knew her stuff, all right.

And then she was standing over me and I was lying there, feeling searing agony in my head and spine, and completely unable to move. My body seemed detached...only the faintest sense of feeling...

She was grinning. "You need lessons, friend," she said. "That was too easy. Never be able to use that one—not even for a spot-quickie. No excitement at all."

I tried to speak and made only a muffled sound.

She laughed, throwing back her head, tossing her blonde hair rather wildly.

A voice called suddenly from the rocks. A man's voice. "Hello! Stary-

ine! What you got there?"

"Don't know exactly," she shouted back. "Come on—give me a hand, and we'll find out!"

A MOMENT later several men were staring down at me. Four altogether. They were all dressed in the same sort of skin-tight garments that gave the first impression of nudity. One had a black beard, the others were clean-shaven. They were all extraordinarily muscular.

"Pick him up," the girl said, "and we'll take him to Kallon; see what Kallon thinks. We better keep an eye on him, so we know it when the nerve block wears off."

The four men picked me up—not very gently. They started to jog along with me, and I could see we were headed for the foothills. The girl kept glancing at me, and I could see that she was feeling a little puzzled, too. I began to suspect that brusque manner of hers was some kind of cover-up—there were little weaknesses and self-doubts inside. "You know," she said, after a few moments, "I have a funny idea he might not be a Vic at all."

"He don't look like one, at that," said the bearded man.

"I thought he was at first," she said. "He seems too muscular for a tech. Though it wouldn't be impossible for him to be one."

The bearded man frowned. "You don't think maybe the Minnies sent him, do you?"

"That's what I want Kallon to decide," she said. "He's talked about spies among us. After all, the Minnies' robots *have* been catching up with us a little too often, lately—"

"Yeah," said the bearded man thoughtfully. "Yeah. They sure have."

Some of the numbness was leaving me, but my skull still felt as if someone had opened the top and poured in a bucketful of molten lead. I groaned,

but not much sound came out.

"You know," the girl said abruptly, "we'd better shout less and telepath more after this. Specially if there are robots around, with their microphones going."

The black-bearded man grinned. "That damned telepathing's too much of a strain. I'd rather fight a gorgol barehanded. Less work."

Staryine looked at me then, saw me move and said, "It's wearing off."

And about then I found my voice. "Hey!"

"Hey yourself."

"Wh—where you taking me?"

"Just be quiet, fella. And don't telepath, either. You'll find out all about it when we get there."

I said, "Listen—I don't have to be quiet, and what's more—"

"Want another nerve block?" She stepped toward me.

I stared back at her for a moment, then said, "No, I guess I don't want another nerve block." The last one still ached.

We moved on, and now the crazy rock formations were all around us, and also a scattering of low hills. We came to the mouth of a deep, winding canyon. They decided I could walk at this point. I could—just about.

I started to wonder again how I'd come here. Amnesia? Had a whole series of events I couldn't even recall brought me here? And just how much time had passed? The disconcerting idea struck me that years or even decades might have passed. I'd have to get to a mirror and see if I was older. I didn't feel older. If anything I felt toned-up, refreshed. And I still wondered what it was that kept bothering me about the sound of my own words, and theirs.

We walked a good mile up the canyon; it began to narrow upon us. There was more foliage: thicket, most of it, of the kind I imagined to be

chapparal. Yet it didn't look quite right. It grew in twisted spirals, and looked evil and deformed—

A MAN WITH a shaggy brown mustache stepped from a clump of the stuff. He held a slender, metallic wand, the size of a cane, in his hand.

"It's all right!" Staryine called to him. "It's only me and the boys. We have a prisoner. Kallon in?"

"Up at headquarters," said the man. He lowered his wand, and stepped back, and we passed.

We went a little further and came to a long bank of piled earth crossing the canyon. There was a little trench behind it. Logs were laid here and there, obviously as defenses, and not far away some men were hauling a log toward these breastworks with a rope. Just beyond the trenches was a plain, low building of baked mud, perhaps eight feet high. We headed for that.

As we crossed the space between the trenches and the building people began to appear from the rocks and thickets. I saw other, smaller mud buildings. The people all wore the curious skin-colored garment; a few had necklaces or wristlets of metal and colored stones. Most of them stared at me curiously; none said anything.

Staryine pushed right on, greeting no one, and brought me to the door of the low building. "In there," she said, pointing, stepping aside.

I shrugged, and went in. I saw a big room; and a man standing at a kind of shelf and pigeonhole arrangement at the far end, apparently filing papers, examining each one quickly as he did so. There were no tables or chairs.

He turned from the shelves, and I saw that he was old, but by no means decrepit. He was muscular like the

others, and his muscles had hardened into dried rawhide. He was deeply tan, and covered with scars, big and little; one huge scar ran from his chin to the corner of his eye and dominated the rest. He was thin, well-proportioned, white-haired. "Well, hello." I had the feeling of absent-mindedness in his deep voice—as if he was willing to do what the moment required, but had his mind on greater things. Politely enough he said, "I'm glad Staryine decided to bring you here. I'm Kallon."

I said, "Hello. My name's Tony. Tony Faulkner. I—" Then I stopped short. "How'd you know I was coming?"

"She telepathed me. Naturally."

"Do all you people telepath?"

"Of course." He looked mildly surprised.

I said, "Look, this may sound silly, but I've had a sort of accident, apparently. I—uh—don't know exactly where I am. If you could tell me, and—"

He frowned quickly. "No tricks. I wouldn't advise any tricks."

"Tricks?"

"The Minnies sent you, didn't they?"

"Listen," I said, patience thin, "I'm trying to tell you—*nobody* sent me here. I had an accident. I'm not even sure what kind of an accident. Wait a minute—I have identification papers if that's what you're worried about." I unsnapped my money belt and took the letter-wallet out. "Here." I handed him my OOC card, my Census Serial, Regional Certificate, and pilot's license.

HE LOOKED at all of them curiously. He frowned. He turned them upside-down, and sideways, and back and forth. It came to me suddenly that he couldn't read. And yet—I glanced at the pigeonholes—he'd

been handling papers. I saw what seemed to be notices hanging on the wall. I squinted at one, hoping for a clue—

*There was writing of some kind on it, but it was completely unintelligible to me: even the characters were just squiggly things, nothing at all familiar!*

Even Kallon looked puzzled now. He handed the papers back. "What's all this mean?"

I said slowly, "Something's—something's gone out of whack. With me, I mean. Maybe we'd better back up and take it all from the beginning. Could I have some water? Or a bite of food, if I'm not imposing?"

"All right," he said. "Water and food you shall have." I couldn't get used to his surface air of friendliness, and the obvious chilled apathy underneath. Here was the sort of man who would never really have any close friends: there was something more important than that for him in life. He frowned intently now, and abruptly I realized he must be telepathing.

Sure enough: a few moments later Staryine came in with a clay bottle, about quart size, and a small plastic box. "Here you are, Tony," she said. Evidently he'd telepathed my name, too. The box was transparent and there were pills in it. "Hope you like the flavor," she said. "It's only the two hundred series, but we can't afford much else these days."

I said, "Huh?"

She said, "Better eat them. You can't go on without nourishment. They're sixty-five percent concentrates, so three ought to fix you up."

Bewilderedly, I said, "Yeah. Three. Thanks." I took three pills and gave the box back. I tasted one. Roast lamb. Don't ask me how or why, but that's what it tasted like. I tilted the bottle, then; it had a small narrow pipe sticking out of the neck, making



an opening for air-pressure flow. Very efficient: I wondered why no one had thought of it before.

*And then suddenly—from the bottle perhaps—I knew with a cold certainty that this must be a completely alien culture. And I had my first suspicion that somehow I wasn't on my own world, or perhaps in my own time, or even my own plane of existence. I was just someplace. Someplace in nowhere.*

I shook off the feeling, telling myself that was ridiculous. The water was clear, sweet and delicious.

Kallon was saying to Staryine, "Hadh't you better get ready to take a batch to the recording station? I think it's your turn."

"I'd better wait for a couple of the boys to come in," she answered. "They're out hunting gorgols."

"Oh, no," said Kallon, groaning a little. "Not gorgols again. They're such old stuff."

"Well, anyway," said Staryine, looking at me, "I want to stick around and see what happens to *him*." Was there a flicker of something in her eye then? Interest? More than that? It was hard to tell.

Kallon said in an impersonal, almost weary tone of voice, "I've already made up my mind about this fellow here."

"Oh?" Staryine lifted an eyebrow. She pushed a stray lock of blonde hair out of the way. Again, she seemed maddeningly familiar. "What?"

"We can't take any chances," Kallon said. He turned and looked at me levelly. "He's got to die."

### CHAPTER III

#### ASK THE STARS

**Y**OU UNDERSTAND that I've faced death before—with neither

more nor less courage than the next man. At times I've even managed to be what you would call philosophical about it. Only this time—well, there was something in the way Kallon stood there, half-smiling, without hate, merely practical and polite and wanting to get on with his work, coolly announcing I'd have to die—

Little rats with cold feet went up and down my spine.

For a moment I couldn't say anything. I couldn't think of anything to say that would do any good. I couldn't think how to begin explaining that everything was a mistake, that this whole world, wherever it was, was a mistake, and that I was a mistake, too. It was clear we'd be talking about different things, no matter what was said.

And then I remembered some of the conversation on the way here, and I grasped at a straw.

"Kallon," I said suddenly, "maybe this'll convince you I'm not a spy—or whatever you have in mind. Did you know I saw a robot crossing the desert just before I ran into you people?"

His eyebrows rose. He stared at me even more flatly. "A robot? Near here?"

I described the thing; told how I'd tried to follow it.

Kallon and Staryine exchanged glances. Kallon said, "That means it's on automatic course, that's why it didn't see or hear you. The controller was away from his screen. But—well, it's the first one reported in this area. I don't like it."

"Hadh't I better set up an alert?" asked Staryine.

The thin, scarred old man nodded absent-mindedly, then waved, telling her to go ahead. She turned and strode from the door.

"Kallon," I said.

"Yes?" He came unwillingly out of

his reverie.

"If you'll listen now, I'll try to explain something. Maybe we can figure out the rest of it together. I—I hope you can get this into your head. Kallon, I'm from someplace else. I don't know where: another world, another time—someplace. Is that conceivable to you?"

He stared at me thoughtfully. "Yes," he said slowly, "That might explain things. Your curious dress, for instance." He nodded at the hibiscus-covered shorts.

"Curious is probably the word," I said, sighing a little. "Even where I come from."

He couldn't appreciate that, of course. He ran his thumb over a few chin scars. "If you're telling the truth," he said, "you probably don't know what's going on here. Yet if you did know, you'd understand why we have to be careful. I—I wouldn't put it past the Minnies to think up a scheme involving a strange man, such as yourself, coming to us and claiming he's from another world just to put us off guard."

I STARTED another cigarette, and both it and my chemical draw lighter astonished him. He didn't comment, though. "Now, look," I said, "there are a number of checks I can make to find out where I am, how I got here. The moon, the great dipper, the sun itself. But a few basic questions might do it even more simply. First of all, did you ever hear of World City? New York? London? How about the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans?"

He looked blank.

"All right," I said, "let's try something else. How is it you speak English?"

"What's English?" he asked.

"What we're speaking," I said.

He shook his head. "I'm speaking

Alderdel. I don't know what *you're* speaking. The Uniwave is making us understand each other, of course."

"The what?"

"The Uniwave." He paused, cocked his head. "You know, if you're faking all this, you're being exceptionally clever about it. But then if you're really from some other world, I don't suppose you would know about the Uniwave."

"I give you my word," I said, "I never heard of the Uniwave in my life."

"Well," he said, still looking doubtful, "it's a frequency. You understand what a frequency is? Very well. It covers the world. It's broadcast from Metropolis One. Not being a tech, I don't understand it fully—they only give us Vics about ten years of school, you know—but I think it works by being in resonance with the microwave oscillations of the brain's speech center."

I didn't even try to understand. I went on with my questioning. "Techs have been mentioned several times. And I think—Minnies. Is that it? What are they?"

He smiled a little. "You *are* going to have a hard time, being neither tech nor Minnie—nor even a Vic. Although you strike me as coming closest to a Vic. That's what we are."

"You're Vics, then. You—Staryine—the rest around here."

"Yes. Now let's see if I can make this clear. To begin with, we have the world; the planet we're on. There are twelve cities of Metropolis size: Metropolis One, Two, Three, and so on, about a hundred sub-metropolises, and quite a few folk bases. That's where most people live. That is, of course, where *all* the Minnies and techs live. We Vics stay outside."

"You're doing fine," I said. "Go on."

"The Minnies run things, Minnie

—short for Administrator. I don't know just how it came about; we Vics aren't taught history, and I think it's even been abolished for the techs, now. But the Minnies operate the World Circuits, and of course, they're adapted and trained to that. Techs or Vics couldn't begin to do it. Unless they happened to be like Staryine, who was a tech in Central Control for a while, but came over to us."

"Keep going," I said, frowning, "I'm trying to follow."

HE STARTED to pace. "Techs do the jobs the machines and circuits can't efficiently do—which means, more or less, that they operate and maintain the machines and circuits. The Minnies control the things. Techs look more like us than they do Minnies—only they're never quite as hard or healthy." He said this with a note of pride. "They have an *in-door* look."

"And you—the Vics?"

"Vic is short for Vicarious Adventurer."

"I'm hanging on," I said. "Go ahead."

"Well, nobody *has* to be a Vic. Most of us are born into it, of course. We could go to a metropolis and be a tech, theoretically, if we had a trade or skill—but naturally none of us would think of it."

"Maybe I'd better sit down," I said.

He bristled curiously. "Techs and Minnies sit down," he said. "Vics seldom do."

"All right, all right," I said, "I'll stand if it makes you happier. Now tell me why in blazes a Vic is a Vicarious Adventurer."

"To entertain the Minnies. They never get out of their moving chairs, of course: all they do is push buttons from the time they're born. They—er

—even reproduce by remote control, so to speak."

"Sounds like the Minnies don't have any fun at all."

"Precisely. That's exactly it. You see, actual human experience is so completely denied to them that they have an insatiable thirst for *vicarious* experience. And that's where we come in. *We have all their adventures for them.*"

Dawn in my brain. The first gray flush of it, anyway. "Then—that explains why Staryine wanted to wrestle. And this business about hunting gorgols—whatever they are. You Vics, then, just go around looking for new adventures all the time, is that it?"

"We have to." He smiled dryly. "We're paid for them at the recording stations. Vics are the only ones who need money by the way: if you live in a metropolis everything is taken care of. So we don't eat unless we have adventures. Of course, we've worked out a system in each unit of pooling everything so that none of us actually starves. The Minnies don't like that very much—they don't mind handing things out to their little slaves, the techs, but they have a terrific emotional resistance to the idea of common ownership."

"Look, can't you grow food? Raise animals?"

"Not without hydroponic centers. They're all in the cities. So are the refining and concentrating plants. As for natural food, there isn't a spot left on the planet that'll grow much of it. I understand that some aeons ago there was more water, though."

"You mean this—this dry atmosphere is all over the world?" I recalled the clear sky, the reddish sun, the parched, powdered look of the plain.

"Certainly," he said. "Except in cities. They're atmosphere-conditioned."

"I'm trying hard," I said, with a frown. "I'm trying to get it all straight. About these adventures, now. You get paid for them. Why can't you just make them up? You know—stories."

Kallon laughed. "Oh, that's done now and then. But it's pretty hard to get away with. They put lie detectors on us when we bring them in—spot check. I've heard that fiction used to be common, centuries ago, but it simply isn't entertaining to Minnies or Vics unless they're sure the story they watch actually happened. Keeps us hopping, all right."

"You say the stories they *watch*."

"Yes. In the repliviewers. I don't suppose you know what they are, either."

"No," I said, a little weakly, "I'm afraid not." I could hear a bustling outside. Through the open doorway I saw men trot across the clearing, apparently gathering together. Most carried the same kind of slender wand the sentry down the canyon had held. I said, "What's this danger from the robots, anyway?"

NOW HIS face became very serious. The long scar whitened. "Well, Tony," he said, "we Vics live out here, close to nature, close to all her challenges, and close to human values. We think it's wrong that Minnies should be in power—should own other people, even if they do offer security to them. Much of this we feel, rather than think, I suppose. We're really not terribly bright. At any rate, we believe we're right, and we hope that some day we may be able to get into the cities and destroy the whole machine circuit that keeps the Minnies where they are—indeed, that developed the need for the special class of Minnies in the first place."

"You mean you have an organized movement of some kind?"

Kallon nodded, and gestured about the room. "This is only one headquarters. We have to keep it simple, because we have to move pretty often. The Minnies know about us—they know about almost everything with those machine circuits of theirs. They don't think analytically themselves; they're just very clever in translating any given problem into machine symbols, and getting on it on the right combination of machines, or subject circuit. Anyway, we move about, and from time to time the robots attack. They may attack now."

"You'll fight back?"

"For a while. The main thing is to get our headquarters moved." He smiled. "I can't afford to trust you completely yet, you know, and give you the details of that. Maybe later. Maybe sometime you'll be one of us—"

I shook my head. "I'll be frank with you, too, Kallon. All I want to do now is get back where I came from. And the first step, I guess, is finding out where I am. I wonder, for instance, if your earth is my earth. Do you have a moon?"

"Yes. You'll see it tonight, no doubt."

"What of the stars? The constellations? Do you have one shaped like a dipper in the north, revolving around Polaris?"

Kallon laughed and put up his hand. "Now, now—such matters are for techs. Why would we know about stars?"

"Well," I said, "navigation—"

He shook his head blankly. He didn't seem to understand the word. Strange, too, living outdoors, moving over vast spaces as the Vics must do. He said then, "You're best bet would be to have a machine circuit work on your problem. Only that would mean going to one of the cities, and—"

There was a sudden, continuous, grating scream in the air. A reddish light flashed off and on, off and on—I couldn't see where it came from. But the whole thing cried: *Alarm!* And left no doubt about it.

Kallon was frowning, concentrating—receiving thoughts. "It's the robots, all right! They're entering the canyon, now—"

"Look," I said quickly, thinking how I might build up a little more trust around here, "the least I can do is get into this scrap. How about it?"

He looked at me sharply. He hesitated for an instant, then said, "Go to the breastwork. Staryine's there—she's in command. She'll find an extra wand for you."

"I—uh—never fought a robot before."

He smiled. "You'll learn."

I left him.

## CHAPTER IV

### ESCAPE IN TIME

**S**TARYINE handed me a wand and said, "Hold this end to your eye. Move it as if on a pivot until the image comes together, then press this part near the end with your right hand."

We were at the breastworks. I hadn't seen any robots yet, but the brush and boulder-strewn canyon below us was ominously quiet. I was trying to keep my eyes from Staryine's lithe, tanned figure and tumbling blonde hair long enough to pay attention to what she said.

"What does it do to the target?" I asked. I looked at the wand curiously. It was the first weapon I'd ever heard of that you held sideways.

"Well, I'm not a tech," she said, using that odd, defensive tone Kallon had used when saying the same thing,

"but it's a matter of stopping the molecular movement of a gas in a confined area. Freezing the air, in a way. With the pressure gone—the actual hammering of molecules in all directions—anything airtight collapses. A man's lungs, for instance. The robots all work on a pressure chamber, so it affects them, too. The place to aim is about two inches below the neck."

"Lady," I said, "I'll take your word for it."

She moved suddenly, then. She had been peering nervously across the breastwork, and now she rose a little, and brought the wand up. She held it as a man would hold a flute, but with the inner end to her eye. She squeezed with her right hand. I heard a sharp hiss, seemed to smell ozone, and then I looked where she'd aimed and saw a flurry of movement in the brush. A second later a dull, metallic shape fell forward, his boxlike chest caved in.

I said I would be damned. She nodded, absent-mindedly agreeing.

Several other wands were hissing now, on both sides of us. Occasionally a quick hiss came from the underbrush, but the only effect I could see was an occasional blue shimmering here and there along the top of the breastwork.

"Do these robots—well, think, all by themselves?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Each one had an operator—a Minnie—back in a city, probably Metropolis One. The operator watches a screen and listens with earphones. The one you saw out on the plain was probably on automatic, with the operator simply setting the controls and leaving his screen. No doubt he was walking to the rendezvous with these others. It was lucky he didn't see or hear you."

Suddenly three robots, abreast, appeared around a bend in the trail.



They made no attempt to conceal themselves. They moved on, their ugly lenses shining with glassy indifference.

Staryine lifted her wand. I did the same, and looked into the little finder where there was an image of the central robot, split in the middle, and shifted out of register. I saw him lift his own wand.

*Fft! Fft! Fft!* went the air around our heads.

"They don't aim very well," said Staryine calmly. "Too much discrepancy by the time it gets back to the operator's screen." Her own wand went *fft!*

I moved mine until the sight-image came together. Then I squeezed. The wand hissed and felt momentarily warm in my hand, but nothing happened. The three robots kept coming.

Staryine said, "That's funny."

"Did you miss, too?"

"I don't miss," she said, a little stiffly.

But the robots were still walking.

**WE** HEARD excited cries from both sides of us now, and heard hissing from every direction, and I realized the other Vics had been shooting at these robots, and not downing them, either.

Staryine was peering over the breastwork. "They're different. They're newer. Look at the fittings of those arm plates. Smaller joints."

I couldn't tell, of course, not having had my course in Robot Identification—but it did seem to me their gait was somehow different. The three machines were scarcely twenty-five yards from us now.

Suddenly, on the right, a man jumped from the breastworks and ran toward the robots. It was the black-bearded fellow who had walked to the canyon with us.

Staryine cried, "Britt! No! Don't!"

Britt kept charging. He'd left his wand behind, and he ran in a slight crouch with his arms curved and spread, and his magnificent muscles rippling with every movement.

"He's such a fool," said Staryine.

"He's brave—but he's such a fool!"

"Your boy friend?" I asked. It was a devil of a time to ask a thing like that, but I couldn't help myself. And I wanted her to say no, I realized suddenly.

But either she didn't hear or thought the question not worth answering.

Britt slammed into one of the robots suddenly—the one on the left. He made a flying tackle, striking the thing's thighs with his shoulder. I could hear him hit. The robot didn't budge; it merely began to thrash its arms about swiftly and viciously. Britt tried to back away then. He tried to slip from under those flailing hunks of metal.

Then he caught one. Right in the side of the skull—and I could hear the dull crunch. He dropped.

Staryine gave a soft gasp.

From the thicket, and from the trail itself now, more robots suddenly appeared. Wands hissed, kept hissing; the air was thick with the sound. They kept coming. I could see now that a good many of them were the newer models, and didn't drop when they were moleculed.

"We'd better fall back," said Staryine. She stood, shouted an order. The air went *fft!* near her head, and she ducked again.

We all left the breastwork, then, trotting toward the low building. Every once in a while one of the Vics would turn and rather hopelessly use his wand again. But the robots kept coming. The area was full of them now—at least thirty had appeared. One man made a dash for it—tried to slip through the advancing line. A

robot moved with incredible swiftness, caught him, held him by the middle with one hand, and bent him back steadily with the other. He dropped him, screaming and kicking, when he had broken the back.

One or two others tried to circle and come up on the robots from behind. They didn't succeed. The robots had either wide-angle vision or some sort of sensors in the rear.

Staryine and I had zigzagged to the cover of a log, and we were catching our breaths before making another dash. Staryine said, "Sometimes you can sneak up on them and knock them down, if they're not expecting it, and then once they're down you can hack them apart. But you can't get to them often."

**S**OMETHING was curled at my feet. It was the rope the men had been dragging the log with. I frowned, then raised my eyebrows suddenly. "Listen," I said, "I think I know how to give 'em a surprise."

Behind us we heard Kallon's voice. We turned and saw his white head sticking from the door. "Just a little longer!" he shouted. "Hold them off a little longer! We've got most everything moved!"

Staryine said, "What's your little surprise?"

I was already gathering up the fallen rope. "The others'll have to follow suit—pick up other ropes around here. Think they can do what I do?"

"I'm telling them now," she said. She was squinting, frowning. That meant she was telepathing the instructions. The strain of it was quite visible on her face, and I could imagine that people here like to telepath no more than people where I came from liked to think.

I had my rope ready then, and several of the other men were already preparing theirs, and a few

had run into the house for more rope. I came from behind the log, and inched cautiously toward the nearest robot. He lifted his wand. *Ffft, ffft!* went the air, just beyond my shoulder. I started to rise. I didn't have the faintest idea whether or not this thing would really work, but I reasoned that the robot operators might not know about roping, might not guess what I was up to, and so be caught off balance. I had a loop in the rope. I'd learned to tie it—and swing it—chasing wild cattle on the western deserts. I gave it one twirl to open it, and then let it fly with a flick of the wrist to keep it open. It settled over the robot's head. I pulled—it tightened—I kept pulling. It literally caught him off balance. I yanked him forward, flat on his face.

Instantly other Vics dashed up to the thing and pressed the lenses deep into the ground, blinding them. At the same time other loops were flying, settling around metal heads and shoulders. I had to hand it to the Vics—they caught on quickly.

Now I saw that some of them were hacking with little tools, like prospector's picks, at the chinks in the fallen robot's armor. They worked swiftly, ducking *ffts*, and jumping out of the way if another robot came upon them. They covered one another. It was curious that these Vics—wild and completely free—had an almost perfect sense of teamwork and cooperation. They didn't all escape disaster. I saw the *fft!* catch one in the chest not ten feet from where I stood: his ribs simply collapsed and he dropped, gasping.

Another robot—who had apparently lost his wand—came charging at me, arms outstretched. I sidestepped, put the loop on him as he passed. He toppled, fell with a thud. Two Vics with hammers leaped on him.

One of them looked up at me and

grinned and said, "Too bad we can't use this for an adventure—it'd be a beauty!"

I supposed he meant that if this story were turned in the rebels would be identified. I said, "Uh huh," and looked for another robot to rope.

About that time Staryine's strong, clear voice came from the door of the low house. "All right, everybody! Let's go!"

The others turned and ran that way and so did I. The air kept hissing around us. We zig-zagged.

WHEN I got inside I saw that the big room was now starkly empty. The banks of pigeonholes were no longer in sight, just blank walls, and there was a large trapdoor open in the middle of the floor. Staryine and Kallon were standing by it, and the other Vics were dropping into it, disappearing. I looked into the hole and saw only a kind of mist.

"You wait," said Staryine. "You can jump with me."

"But—where does it go?"

Both Kallon and Staryine seemed to think that was very funny; they looked at each other and laughed.

Outside I could hear the shouting of the last few Vics; the rear guard. They began to trickle inside. And then came the last man yelling, "That's all!" He ran and dove head-first in the hole in the floor. Kallon dropped after him. A robot loomed in the doorway.

"Come on!" said Staryine.

She grabbed my hand, and we jumped together. The mist swallowed us; it was all around, and it seemed strangely illuminated like the upper part of a cloud bank near the sun. I felt no sensation of falling. It seemed that the seconds passed slowly; I tried to speak to Staryine and found my jaws and tongue frozen.

Suddenly our feet were touching

ground, and the mist had cleared. I looked up. We had come out of an aperture in the bottom of an overhanging rock, and we stood at the base of a huge cliff. The sensation on landing had been that of dropping possibly four or five feet.

Ahead of it there was a forest of thin, scrubby pines.

"How—how did we get *here*?" I asked.

"Through the time passage," she said. She seemed to think I ought to know what she was talking about. "We always build our headquarters near a time fault, and tap into it."

"Are we now—er—later or earlier than we were. I mean than we ought to be."

"Neither," she said. "Time faults translate space into time. Don't you know that? We're hundreds of miles away. We're not too far from Metropolis One, now."

I said, "I give up." But I didn't give up; I had another thought. "Won't the robots follow?"

"Of course not," said Staryine. "They can't move through time: no awareness of it."

I was going to ask more, but at that moment I saw Kallon's wiry, scarred figure ahead, and beyond him I saw that other Vics had gathered in a clearing. Some were making a fire, others were passing around food pills and long-necked bottles.

Staryine and Kallon got together then and started to hold a low, earnest conversation. I sat down—more confused than tired—with my back against a tree. Someone gave me a food pill and I took it automatically. It tasted like eggs this time. The water was again cool and welcome.

Now the fire was crackling, sending long splashes of red light upon the trees, making wavering shadows behind them. I thought of my own world—wherever it might be. It wasn't such

a hot world, I'd often complained, not the way this stifling trend of specialization was going, anyway, but it was at least a world I was adjusted to. I had the feeling I'd never feel quite at ease here: someplace in nowhere.

AFTER A while Kallon and Staryine strolled over. I still didn't know what to think of Kallon: he was one of these men who strikes with you agreement, and even admiration, for everything but that sense of personal accord that makes friendship. He was a man too preoccupied with what he was doing. It wasn't really up to me to say whether that was good or not. At any rate, as far as Vics generally were concerned I felt already a kind of emotional kinship with them: that is to say, I'd already decided I didn't like techs or Minnies, even though I'd never met any.

"Well, Tony," said Kallon, in his grave, even sad, scarred way, "we owe you a lot. Your idea about using ropes held them off just long enough for us to clear everything out. It would have been disastrous to leave our records in their claws."

I smiled. "You're convinced, then, that I'm not a spy, now."

"Yes, I suppose so." Kallon smiled back. "If one can ever really be convinced, the way things are."

Staryine, all this time, was looking at me closely. I didn't dare tell myself what I thought I saw in her eyes: I was alien, a stranger, after all. But she kept looking.

"Tony," Kallon said, "if you will, you can help us immeasurably. Staryine and I have been talking it over. We think we know how you can do every Vic out here a great service—and at the same time find some of the answers to your own problems."

"Oh?" I was cautious.

He rubbed his chin. "Tony, we want you to go to Metropolis One."

"The city? The main one?"

He nodded. "Everything is controlled from there, and of course that's where all the master switches for the machine circuits are. That's the one sure place for you to find where you are, and how to get back—if that's what you want."

"And how does this help you?"

"We're pretty certain by now that the Minnies have an organized system of spies, working in our midst. We've got to find out who they are. We do have our own spies of course—techs who work in the cities and are sympathetic to us—but the list of *their* spies would be rather closely guarded. Found, I suppose, only at the very top. It would be difficult for one of us, or one of our friendly techs, to get into the Central Control Room, itself."

"It sounds as if it might be difficult for me, too," I said.

"No—I don't think so. You could merely appear. Show yourself. You'd be quite an oddity. It wouldn't be long before you were questioned, machine-analyzed, and then taken to Thrag, or one of the other leading Administrators. In other words, you'd be a great scientific curiosity. There's a good chance that somewhere along the line you'd find out who they have spying on us. Meanwhile, we'll be arranging to get in touch with you, somehow—probably through one of our own techs. When the time comes we'll figure a way to get you back again, if you want to come back. Though maybe by then you'll have found a way back to your own world."

I frowned and said, "Your pals, the Minnies, may think I'm more than just a scientific curiosity."

"They don't think," he said quickly. "Not in the sense we do. They

think only in terms of breaking down a problem into symbols for the machine circuits. If the machines confirm that you're from some other world, some other time, they'll believe it without asking any more questions."

I laughed. "Looks like the machines do *some* good, then."

"Certainly. And when, some day, we overthrow the Minnies, we won't destroy the machines completely. We'll leave just enough to benefit without oppressing."

"And how," I asked, smiling, "are you going to know what is—just enough?"

"Simple," he said. "We'll put that problem up to the machines, and let *them* decide it!"

LATER THAT evening Staryine and I wandered a little away from the clearing into the soft gloom of the pine trees. We came to another clear place after a while, and I stopped, and stood for a long moment, looking at the sky. There was a moon. Its size and markings seemed familiar—and yet in many subtle ways, different. I couldn't be sure it was the same moon I'd always known. Not even when it made stirrings inside me as I thought of Staryine.

I looked at it for a long time and finally I said, "I'll go to Metropolis One, as Kallon wants."

Her voice was soft. She was beside me, near me; I could feel the warmth of her. "Yes," she said, "I knew you would."

I turned, looked down into her white, moon-painted face. She started to talk matter-of-factly, even as a girl in my own world would have done to cover up an emotional moment. "I'll be going to the recording station tomorrow to take the latest batch of adventures, you can come along with me. I'll show you where

the city gate is, and how to get in, and outline all the rest of the plans for you, and—"

I took her by the arms and pulled her toward me. She lifted her lips, slightly parted. We came together. I pressed my own lips into the moist warmth of hers and held them there, tasting fire.

That, at least, was out of *this* world....

## CHAPTER V CENTRAL CONTROL

THE WALLS were faced with marble—or more likely a fine plastic imitation. The whole vestibule of this building reminded me of a tomb. Metropolis One, ever since I'd entered it about twenty-four hours ago, reminded me of a graveyard full of tombs.

And it made my skin crawl.

It was a curious moment. I was thrown back, in feeling and sense, to the point in time when I'd entered the Bureau of Sociopsychology Building back in my own world. Everything that had happened since then went through my mind with a rushing murmur.

One of my guards said, "All right—get along there. We haven't got all day."

This was the Control Building of Metropolis One. I had an appointment—or perhaps I should say a command appearance—with Thrag, the Chief Administrator. Staryine had taken me to the outskirts of the city in a curious public conveyance that traveled by what appeared to be rocket power and was suspended from an overhead rail. We'd walked to the nearest boarding point from the pine grove and picked our own individual car from several on a siding.

"It's the one public service the Minnies allow us," Staryine had explained.



We'd stopped a few miles from the city, then walked to a cluster of rocks on the outskirts. I'd viewed it from there. The look of the white, sunstruck buildings, at once towering and squat, was thrilling, and a little frightening, too. I thought of the word "Power!" roared in a deep and rumbling voice.

From the rocks Staryine pointed out the recording station, a low, rambling group of buildings just outside the city limits. Vics brought their adventures here and narrated them into recorders. The records were then shipped by pneumatic tube to the Entertainment Production Centers—I'd find out about all this later, in the city, Staryine assured me. She showed me the entrance gates, then, where techs trained as guards kept vigil. Sometimes at night, she explained, a Vic could slip into the city—but ordinarily no self-respecting Vic would have any part of the place. She made me rehearse my role again. I was to stagger up to the gate, apparently out of nowhere, and be very bewildered—just as I had after waking up on the dry plain.

"You won't be alone," she said cryptically. "We'll be working with you all the time, keeping track of you. You'll be contacted for your information when we find the right way."

I kissed Staryine long and passionately, then made the actual parting abrupt. I didn't look back.

Everything, then, had come off smoothly. So far. It had taken about twenty-four hours to develop this appointment with Thrag himself. The guards at the gate had questioned me harshly and stupidly at first, until a supervisor or officer of some sort had come along and with a rare flash of brilliance detected something unusual in my story. I'd been kept there at the gate house while the word went up, from level to level, and apparent-

ly reached the top. They'd jumped when the order came down from Thrag himself. "Bring him!" They'd taken me through the streets in one of the overhead rail cars, which seemed to keep going, even when empty, so that you could grab one at any time and at stations set only a few hundred yards apart. When you pressed a button it stopped automatically, allowed you just enough time to board or disembark, and then spurted in the first few seconds to catch up to its place in phase with the others again. I'd seen the people of Metropolis One as we whizzed through the streets. These were all Techs: they were more thoroughly dressed than the Minnies, and usually in distinctive styles or colors which the guards explained as marks of occupation. It struck me that they moved through the streets very purposefully and efficiently, seldom getting in each other's way, and observing a kind of right hand traffic rule as they walked. There were, of course, no sidewalks on account of the overhead cars, and the streets were entirely used by pedestrians.

I WAS STILL curious to see a Minnie, and as the guards took me to an elevator, now, in this Control Building, I knew it wouldn't be long. The elevator seemed to travel upward for many minutes before it stopped. We stepped then into a long corridor: the walls glowed faintly, themselves the source of light. Abruptly, the guards halted in the middle of the corridor. I could see no doors, nor signs of anything. Then one of the guards stepped toward the wall, took from his pocket a small matchbox-shaped thing and held it up. He did something to the matchbox with his fingers. I had the impression that a bolt of flame jumped from the matchbox to the wall—almost too swiftly.

to see. It left me with my mouth open.

And then a square doorway opened in the wall, and I found myself blinking into a huge and brilliantly lighted room.

"Come in, Tony, come in!" said a deep and hearty voice and for an instant I swore it was Dr. Petrius Corput greeting me again.

But it wasn't. It was someone in a kind of wheel chair near the center of the room; I was still blinking and couldn't see him clearly yet. The room was oval-shaped—everything highly polished, even the floors and ceiling. The walls were covered with rows of buttons, dials, viewplates, slots and panels; units fitted into racks. It might have been the control room of a broadcasting network—but on a tremendous scale.

Now my eyes focused, and I could see the man before me. If he could be called a man—

I felt a slow, creeping shock as I looked at him. His head was huge, bulbous, shaped like an inverted pear. It was bald, and the skin was tight on the skull, stretched almost to translucency. His eyes were small and deeply recessed. His nose was tiny and narrow, the nostrils mere slits. He had no teeth, but his lips nevertheless seemed strong and mobile.

It was the man's body, though, that really startled me. It was small, but soft and round, like the hind segment of an ovulated ant. He had his legs crossed in the seat of the wheel-chair, and they weren't legs at all, they were merely shriveled stubs. His arms, however, were long and thin: they looked agile, if not actually strong. His hands rested on rows of buttons in the arms of the chair, and I saw that he had six fingers, and that they tapered to tweezer-like points, without fingernails.

He was adapted, all right. He was

adapted to travel in a wheel chair and push buttons.

HE SMILED coldly and impersonally. "Well, Tony," he said, "your appearance is extremely interesting, but I can't for the life of me see how we're going to make it useful, unless possibly as entertainment. One of the machines may have some ideas on it."

I said, "What? Look—where am I? How did I get here? This is all the craziest place I ever saw!"

He laughed. "Oh, I think we'll be able to get all the answers presently. My colleagues are pretty excited about having a look at you—but I told them I'd better talk to you first. I've gone over the reports the guards sent in, and the results of the rather perfunctory machine examination back there at the gate-house. You know, we thought at first you might be a Vic spy—you look like a Vic—but we're pretty certain now you actually are an alien form of life."

"Vic spy?" I wasn't supposed to know about Vics.

"You really have a lot to learn before you're orientated, don't you?" mused Thrag. He pushed a button on his chair. A section of floor came up behind me, stopping at the level of my thighs, and making a seat. "Well, sit down, Tony, and I'll try to give you a picture of everything, then we'll call in the others and decide what to do with you."

I sat, Thrag talked, and I listened. I was struck by the clean arrangement of his ideas: not a wasted thought or word. I sensed an extremely high, but brittle intelligence behind that oversized forehead, behind those sunken, beady eyes. I listened carefully, and he told me first about his solar system. It was nine planets, this was the second from

the sun. At first this seemed proof I'd left my own Earth, but he pointed out that my planet in the past or future (according to my time) might have been or would be the second planet. He did admit that I might have crossed into another lane of probability. Meanwhile, he described planets that sounded much like Jupiter, Saturn and the rest—but I still didn't really know where I was. There were minor differences all along the line. The planet corresponding to Uranus, for instance, had six satellites, instead of five—although, again, that proved nothing conclusively. There was a planet with Saturnian rings, but it was between those corresponding to Jupiter and Mars. Altogether the discussion was not only inconclusive, but disturbing, too.

"Well, obviously," Thrax finally said—after we'd covered the solar system and his planet, too—"we'll have to get a circuit to figure it all out. Frankly, I didn't expect you to know. The results of that intelligence test the guards gave you show you to be slightly lower than us in mental capacity—about on a par with the Vics, as a matter of fact. Your physique would seem to indicate that physical exertion is necessary wherever you come from, so we can assume a fairly low form of civilization."

I bristled inside, but said, "Well, what now?"

"We'll get the council members to look at you. Then we'll all work your data into circuit-symbols, and let the machines take it from there." He pressed another button, and the door in the wall, which he'd closed to invisibility, opened once more. I turned. A moment later other creatures in mobile chairs started to roll in. I hadn't the faintest idea where they'd come from, or how they'd arrived so fast.

I STARED at them. They all resembled Thrax, with very slight individual differences. I heard Thrax mumble names: "Helton, our psycho-chemist... Limaris, our expert in force and matter... Canthon, our concept-analyzer..." I couldn't keep track of them all. Fourteen, altogether.

"Suppose we begin," said Thrax, "by having you tell again the story in your own words. These gentlemen would like to observe as they hear it, I'm sure."

Canthon rolled forward. "How about shielding him from the Uniwave, so we can hear what his original language sounds like?"

"Later, later," said Thrax, waving his tapered fingers. "All right, Tony—just tell us, in your own words, everything that led to the moment before you got here." He pressed a button. A light glowed on the panel, a soft whirring started, and I knew that I was being either photographed, or recorded, or both.

I started my story. I sketched it as briefly as possible, a picture of my own civilization and the rather peculiar part I played in it. I told of coming to Corput's laboratory and described what I remembered of the technical details of his experiment.

Thrax interrupted here to turn to Helton, the psycho-chemist, and asked, "Does that sound reasonable?"

Helton had a dry, precise voice. "Quite probable," he said. "The ultimate formula they sought to specialize anyone from birth was obviously what we call keterone. Here—I'll show you."

He pressed a button-combination on his chair, and a diagram flashed on a screen on the wall. It was one of those cellular diagrams used to show molecular structure with hexagonal symbols.

Helton read them off, droning.

"CH2 down into C equalling O, seventeen position, OH..."

"Whoa!" I said. "Start that again." I fumbled for my note pad, the one built into my wallet. "I want to get this down."

"What for?" asked Thrag.

"In case I get back. Corput'd give his right arm for that formula."

They laughed uproariously, then; they looked all around at each other and kept laughing.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"Nothing, nothing," said Thrag, still laughing. He pointed to Helton. "Go ahead—give him the formula."

I shrugged, Helton rattled off the formula again, and I wrote it down, and put the wallet back. This was no time to try to understand the Minnie sense of humor—it would probably be unfathomable to me, anyway.

When Helton had finished, Thrag said, "All right, Tony. Tell us the rest."

I told them—omitting only the fact that I'd met the Vics and seen a robot.

Thrag nodded. "The story seems to hold together. You gentlemen think so?"

They thought so.

"Well, then," said Thrag, "I'd say it was time to put a circuit on his problem."

They nodded, and murmured assent.

"I'll see that your comfortable," Thrag said to me, "while we symbolize the data. It may take a while." He pressed buttons, then, the doors opened, and the two guards appeared. "Twenty-four-A-six," Thrag said to them. And to me: "Just follow."

**L**ONG CORRIDORS again, this time many of them, sometimes curving, sometimes turning sharp corners. The flat, multidirectional light from the walls was like the floating

light of a dream. The guards, shadows, stalking ahead. The soft rolling of Thrag's mobile chair beside me.

After a while they stopped. "All right, here we are," said Thrag. I don't know how he knew. He used more buttons, and the square doorway appeared instantly in the wall. "Go right in," he said.

The room was about twenty feet square. It looked comfortable. There was a thick, lemon-yellow rug on the floor, and furniture—looking fairly conventional—scattered about. There was a couch and recognizable chairs. A cabinet with dials in a far corner looked very much like a television set.

"You'll find just about anything you want here," Thrag said, "so you might as well be comfortable while you wait. I'll come back for you when the circuits have completed their analysis on you."

"And then what happens?" I asked.

He sensed my disquiet. He smiled very faintly, with his usual lack of warmth and said, "That will depend on the answers, of course. You may find yourself a subject for dissection for our physiological experts; you may be merely assigned to the entertainment division, or you may even be classed as a Vic. There are several hundred probabilities. You might as well forget about it now and enjoy yourself."

"Yeah. Great," I said. "Enjoy myself."

He rolled over to the cabinet that looked like a television set. He raised the hinged top. I saw a tiny, circular arena under a large bubble canopy. "The repliviewer here ought to keep you entertained," he said. "Here, I'll dial in a documentary adventure for you. Educational thing. Tells all about the machine circuits."

"You haven't got burlesque, have you?" I asked.

He said, "Hm?"

I said, "Skip it."

He turned the thing on. It glowed. I walked over to it and saw solid things forming out of the haze under the bubble canopy. I must have watched for several seconds; I turned then to say something to Thrag—but he was gone.

Where the door had been nothing but a blank wall stared me in the face.

## CHAPTER VI

### EXTRASENSORY RENDEZVOUS

AND THERE I sat trying to be amused by a nice, educational repliview on the circuits and machines of this queer world.

Under the bubble little men moved in perfect little settings. Sometimes the focus would change, so that there would be close-ups, sometimes I'd appear to see from a distance. A commentator's voice explained everything as it went on.

At that, it was good stuff—if I'd been in the mood for something educational. I saw, even as I mentally poked about for a way out of this mess, that all metropolis-size cities were filled with machines, basically computing machines, and that they had been there for many aeons, since before the Minnies developed their adaptations, like the button-punching fingers and the atrophied legs. Although each machine was alike in principle, various machines had been adapted to various subjects. It took experts to translate problems into machine-symbols suitable for any of these subjects.

There was one machine for what the commentator called "simple problems of light curvature and quanta." Simple, yet! There was another for chemical matters. There were a number of psychological machines, each dealing with special behavior prob-

lems, and some cross-connected to math machines for the solving of equations. Whenever a problem required thought in several fields, coordinators tied them together.

I was getting tired of the thing—about to try to find how to turn it off—when the bubble showed a kind of schematic conception of the universe, and very pretty, too. The commentator's voice said, "The intelligence and foresight of the Administrators have so advanced science that now we understand the nature of time, space and life itself. We know how to move from our own continuum to those of both time and involute expansion. We have even developed a calculator which deals in these provinces. Let us now take a look at Compartment Eight-Eight-Zero in the Control Building of Metropolis One."

There was a replica of a circular room then; I could look right down into the top of it. It was similar to the room where I'd met Thrag.

"This control center," said the voice, "is not often used. It requires tremendous power and would put a severe drain on the power sources for the whole world, perhaps even break everything down beyond repair. However, with the power shut off temporarily, remarkable experiments have been conducted here—they were only abandoned some centuries ago because an evaluation circuit proved them to be useless at least from a practical standpoint."

I looked at the room image with a little more interest.

"From the platform you see in the center," said the commentator, "one may begin a journey either into time, or the curve of involute expansion. During our historical period of final development, many such explorations were made. There is no longer any necessity for this; however, Eighty-



Eight-Zero is still available for such problems of continuance as may appear from time to time—”

I realized suddenly that *this* might be the device to get me back to my own world, time, dimension—wherever I'd come from. And Eighty-Eight-Zero was somewhere in this very building. Only, even if I did get out of this room, I didn't see how I'd ever find it in these unmarked, doorless halls—

**J**UST THEN there was a noise behind me, and I turned, and saw Thrax in his wheel chair again. The wall was just closing behind him. I said, “Back so soon?”

“My intuition was right,” said Thrax.

“About what?”

“I thought you resembled a Vic.” Deep in those cave-sockets, his reptilian eyes blinked slowly. “The circuits discover everything, Tony. They examine every possibility, almost to the infinite. They never forget possibilities put aside or dismissed; they never lose track of their cross-references. They've discovered how you came here.”

“Well, good,” I said. “How did I?”

“You're originally, it seems, from point two-twenty-one on the involute expansion curve. But we know a little more than just that. *We know that you found the Vics first—and that you came to Metropolis One for the express purpose of spying.*”

I stared at him. He stared back. There was a moment of quiet, and finally I said, rather stupidly, “Er—really?”

“You'll have to die, Tony,” he said.

I couldn't answer. I couldn't feel the reality of this. I guess I was in a half-daze.

“We'll have to get the rest of the analysis,” Thrax went on calmly, “and then we'll have to decide how

your dying can be useful. So you've a little time, anyway. The analysis says your species generally believes in a supreme force that is supposed to run the universe, and worships it. You might as well seek comfort in that direction now.”

He sat there, ugly and detestable, alone in his chair. I saw him suddenly as a hateful symbol—and with a cry of anger I leaped forward at him. I was going to smash that delicate oversized head into nothingness...break those willowy arms...puncture that bloated torso...

He must have pressed buttons. There was a blur, and he disappeared. I faced the blank wall of my cell again.

I shouted and swore and pounded on the wall and got exactly nowhere. After a while the terrible frustration spent itself and I went back to the chair and sat down. I stared at the floor hopelessly and stupidly.

Presently I heard a voice.

When I first heard it, I thought it was out of my own day-dream—something bordering on hallucination. But it was startlingly clear, and as it became even clearer I recognized it as Staryine's voice!

“Tony. Try to contact, Tony. Try to get to me.”

She was telepathing from somewhere; little doubt of it. How I was able to receive her, I didn't know—I hadn't been able to receive the stuff before. And how to send? I could only guess. I closed my eyes, frowned, and made myself concentrate. As abstractly as I could, I visualized the idea of sending my thoughts back—

“Tony? Can you hear me, Tony?”

“I hear you, Staryine. I hear your thoughts.” I bore down heavily on that idea.

**I**T ALMOST frightened me when Staryine's voice came back, then,

in my brain. *"Yes! Good! We're in contact, now, Tony. That's the way to do it!"*

I seemed to have the knack, now. "Where are you, Staryine? How come—"

*"Wait. Don't ask questions. There's a job to do. I've heard they've confined you—some of the techs think you've been condemned. You must tell me where you are."*

"I'm in the Control Building. Thrag called this room twenty-four-A-six, if that means anything to you."

*"Right. That would be bank twenty-four, room A, molecular combination six. Now the thing is to get you out. Are you guarded?"*

"I—I think so. I think the two apes who escorted me here are still outside. Wish I knew how to get through that wall."

*"You'd need a molecularizer, and one with combination six on it, at that. But don't worry about it. The guards'll have one. And I know how to handle them. Sit tight, Tony!"*

She broke off suddenly, and then there was nothing but weary nerveless silence.

The next period of time—half-hour, hour, whatever it was—was plain agony. I spent most of it pacing, and muttering to myself and wondering if the muttering meant I was losing control. My palms were cold and moist, and the back of my neck itched, as though from an electric current.

I used up the last of my cigarettes.

Abruptly, there was a noise at the far wall. I turned. The opening had appeared—and the two guards, burly and slit-eyed, were coming through. They were glaring at me. I hadn't paid too much attention to them before, but now I took time to notice that one was rather squat, and had a round face and a beaked nose like a predatory owl; the other was taller, with doughy, emotionless face.

I figured I'd put up a fight. Might as well. I started to lift my fists—

Staryine stepped through the opening behind them!

"All right, boys," she said, confidently and firmly, "stay here by the exit. I'll make this as quick as possible."

They parted, flanking the square opening. Staryine came forward. She walked right up to me.

"Lie down!" she said in a loud voice. "Be quick, and let's have no nonsense about it!"

I sensed that it was an act of some kind. She was dressed in a short-sleeved silvery tunic that fell to her thighs and was gathered about the middle by a metallic belt. She carried what looked like a copper kit.

I obeyed; I laid down on the couch. She bent over me. She opened the copper case and took from it a gadget with two prods, all of it resembling a small ohmmeter. She held the prods like chopsticks and began to tap me light across the chest and stomach. Beyond her the guards kept staring in a hostile way.

Then, once again, her thoughts came to me: very strongly this time. "I'm supposed to be a medico tech," she telepathed. "Can't take time to explain now, but I had some friendly techs get me an order. They think I'm giving you a final examination before your execution. Now we've got to catch them off guard—do you understand?"

"Yes," I thought back.

"In a moment, I'll turn to speak to them. I'll call them away from the exit. When I do that, you make a break—run for it. But don't go out, you'll never make it alone. Turn and strike at the guard nearest you as he comes. I'll take care of the other one."

"Yes, okay," I answered from my mind.

She nodded just imperceptibly to show that she was ready.

She straightened, then. "All right," she said aloud, coldly, "you can get up now."

I got up.

She turned and faced the guards. "This prisoner's in a desperate mental condition. You'd better come cover my exit. Just step over here so he can't jump at me."

The tall, dough-faced one said, "What? Huh?"

"You heard me!" she snapped. "Come over here!"

Both started forward, jumping a little at her tone of command.

**T**HIS WAS it. I took a deep breath.

I pushed past Staryine suddenly and raced for the opening in the wall. I heard the owl-face guard cry out; he pivoted to follow me. I whirled, then, I saw on his face the slow explosion of surprise—and I sent a hard right hook smack into the middle of it.

His nose gave under my knuckles. I jabbed a quick follow-up to the midsection. He doubled over. I brought the right up again, with all my weight behind it. I could hear the crack—like a rotten limb being broken on a stone. Owl-face's head snapped back, and he fell away, stumbling.

I turned quickly to the other guard. I needn't have. This one at the moment was across Staryine's shoulders and was being swung in a dizzy circle. I'd forgotten about her wrestling abilities. As I watched, she slammed him to the floor. He tried to get up again, shakily, and I waited until his jaw was on a level with my waist then clipped it as hard as I could.

He went down, and stayed there.

And then—joyfully and unbelievably—Staryine and I were running

together, out of that room and into the glowing hall. She paused only long enough to work her molecularizer—the one she'd borrowed from the guards no doubt—and close the wall again.

"Now," she said. "Walk. If we meet anyone, try to look casual. Here—we'll go this way." She gestured to the left.

"Is it safe to talk?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "Better if we do—be more natural."

"Then, listen, Staryine," I said, as we started off, "there's a compartment somewhere in the building numbered eighty-eight zero. I found out about it on the repliviewer. I want to get there and—"

"Get back?" She was looking at me strangely. I knew she'd guessed about what was in eighty-eight zero.

I took her arm. "You're coming with me, Staryine. You're coming back to my own world, if we can get there—"

"We can get there," she said, quietly, queerly. "But Thrag or somebody else may get to us first. We've a better chance leaving the building."

"Do—do you want to come with me, Staryine?"

"Oh, Tony, yes!" she cried suddenly, and then she was in my arms, all the living warmth of her, and I was holding her tightly.

After a while she looked up, half-smiled, and said, "We *are* wasting time, aren't we?"

"Some might say that," I told her, smiling back. "Let's go."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CURVE OF INVOLUTE EXPANSION

**I** CAN'T say how long we wandered through those curving halls, because in that queer, artificial light the time-sense was somehow numb. It was

like forgetting each step the moment you took it; each second as it ticked away. There were no doors, no signs, no marks: just curves and corners and an occasional slant, up or down, to another level.

I couldn't tell how Saryine found her way, yet she seemed to know where she was going. She had that air. I tried to ask her once how she could find direction, and she looked at me blankly, evidently not understanding the question. All I could guess was that in this other world beings had an instinctive sense of location and direction, even in unknown places. This might explain why Kallon had been so vague in the matter of the stars—people with a sure sense of direction wouldn't need anything like the science of navigation.

At any rate, Saryine finally halted before a perfectly blank patch of wall and said, "This should be it."

I nodded in a rather futile way.

She pressed the match-box-shaped device. Again I felt that a beam, or lick of flame, jumped to the wall. There was suddenly a square opening before us.

The moment I looked inside I knew this was the room whose image I'd seen back on the repliviewer. This was eighty-eight-zero: and there were the racks and control banks of the circuit I hoped would send me along the curve of involute expansion—whatever that might be—to point two hundred twenty-one. And I hoped Thrag's analysis was right, and that point two hundred twenty-one was really where I wanted to go.

We entered the room, and Saryine closed the opening behind us. I'd already explained Thrag's remarks and everything else to her; and she seemed to understand. Now she made that typical defensive remark of the Vics again: "I'm not a tech, of

course—but I might be able to figure out some of this. I *used* to be a tech right here in Central Control, so that should help."

"Yes," I said, "Kallon told me. What was your specialty?"

She looked at me squarely. She reddened. She said, "Never ask me that. Never ask me that again." And while I stood there staring back in dull surprise, she whirled and stepped to a small console next to the round platform in the middle of the room.

There were plates and position marks on the console covered with the indecipherable (to me) writing of this world, and she examined these carefully. I looked more closely at the platform meanwhile and saw curved, basket-like affairs suspended over it. It came to me suddenly that there was a faint resemblance—in principle, anyway—between this platform and Dr. Corput's array of paraphernalia.

Saryine was making some headway. "Well," she said, "first of all it warns against using the thing beyond seventy-five percent power. Might wreck every machine and circuit in the world, unless they've been adjusted first to a smaller load." She looked up momentarily and smiled. "That doesn't sound like a bad idea at all. We've been trying to do that the hard way."

I said, "How come they don't guard this thing—or set up an alarm system—if it's so dangerous to their precious circuits?"

She laughed. "That's the Minnies for you. They simply don't think analytically themselves, as Kallon told you. Some day if they happen to put the right problem regarding this room into their machine circuits they'll learn that it ought to be guarded—but otherwise it'll simply never occur to them."

"That's their Achillies' heel then,"

I said. "If you know what I mean?"

"Yes." She nodded and went on studying the console.

**S**OMETHING came to me, and startled me somewhat, all of a sudden. How had Staryine—who presumably didn't know the myths of my world—understood the allusion to Achilles' heel? And for that matter, how had I been able to hear letters of the alphabet, such as the "A"—designation of my cell, and the chemical symbols of the keterone formula? All I could suppose was that I grasped the abstract idea from the Uniwave, and then, perhaps out of my subconscious, *supplied my own symbols for the thought*. The fact that everybody's lips seemed to go through the motions of forming English words was probably in the nature of a hallucination: in fact, none of it had looked or sounded quite right ever since I got here, and probably more than any other single factor that had given the whole experience the unreal, astonished, slightly mad quality of a dream....

"It seems," Staryine said now, "that when you put an object on this platform, make the settings, and throw the master switch, the object will travel along the curve of involute expansion. The speed is constant—the usual square of the speed of light."

I said, "I suppose this is a heck of a time to get curious—but just what is the curve of involute expansion?"

She looked at me in surprise, as much as if to say any third grade schoolboy ought to know that. She said, "Why would space curve, if it weren't for involution? There wouldn't be any reason for it. Involution, by providing us with a point where everything starts all over again, gives us our most useful symbol—the infinite root of infinity."

"Oh," I said. Dumbly. In this moment I realized how much of an effort I'd been making all along to adjust myself to this world: to accept things that seemed illogical to me, and yet made perfectly good sense to anyone here. The Vics, for instance. They almost proudly insisted they were little better than ignorant savages—and yet they had no trouble at all, apparently, with a concept like "involute expansion" or "the infinite root of infinity". In a way, it was if I'd tried to write on a Moebius band or drink from a Klein bottle. I began to wonder for the first time what problems Staryine and I would have adjusting to each other once we got back to point two-twenty-one—my world.

And now Staryine was making careful settings on the console. "I—I hope I'm doing this right," she said. "A mistake might take us anywhere. Or even nowhere."

I looked around, filled with the strange idea that the room itself was watching us.

"Get on the platform," said Staryine. She fitted herself into the chair of the console.

I got on the platform. I stared at the network of curved mesh overhead. I looked at Staryine again. She said, "I think it's all set, now," and rose from the seat. She pointed to a bright red lever, something like an emergency brake, on the side of the console. "That's the master switch. There'll be a heating lag, so I'll have a moment to get to the platform after I throw it. Now—"

**A**LL AT once strange, screaming sirens began to wail. A red light throbbed on and off all through the room.

"It's an alarm!" she shouted.



I said, "Come on—can't worry about it, now!"

She threw the master switch.

She turned, ran to the platform, and I took her arm and hauled her on it, beside me. The whole room began to hum softly: it was audible even with the siren wailing. Everything became fuzzy, like a projected image going out of focus.

I was looking at the far wall: the one we'd come through. It opened suddenly. Thrag, in his mobile chair, shot through the opening, and behind him were at least six husky tech guards.

"Stop it! Get off there!" he shouted. He wagged his oversized head. I hadn't known his voice could be so strong and penetrating. Two guards jumped ahead, passing him. "The lever!" yelled Thrag. "The one beside the console! Push it forward!" The guards ran toward the lever.

The humming was louder; the blurring more intense.

I knew now that everything was a matter of fractions of seconds. Once the effect came, we'd be on our way along the curve of involute expansion—otherwise Thrag wouldn't have been in such a desperate hurry to pull that lever.

I was dizzy now from the humming and blurring. I sensed vaguely that Staryine had moved—was no longer beside me. It wasn't until she had already acted that I realized she'd jumped from the platform. *She was headed for that red lever, too—*

"Staryine!"

I tried to move, tried to follow her, but in that moment a terrible force gripped me and held me where I was. It was exactly that feeling you know in a dream, when you try to flee some terrible danger, but can't make your legs obey. I tried to shout her name again, and this time I couldn't even

move my lips. I felt smothered: I wanted to gasp for breath, but couldn't.

And then, somehow, I knew that an overall grayness was about to fall. I had one last, blurred image of Staryine. I saw her tumbling the first guard over her shoulder in a neat and skillful flying mare. The others were already closing in on her—

Grayness blotted out the rest.

I floated in time and space, and along the involute, expansive curve. I was unconscious—yet conscious that this was so. I was numb and keenly sensitive to my numbness. In this queer, indescribable state I felt that somehow—for the moment—I truly understood all concepts.

And I thought of Staryine. She had sacrificed herself that I might go. I was saddened, but at the same time I was sure that she would live, and that all of Thrag's cities would be destroyed—by the overload, perhaps—and that the Vics would rise, and the button-pushing species wither away.

Abruptly the whole sensation was gone, and I saw that I was lying on my back and looking up at a jumble of cross-bars and gleaming reflectors.

Corput's voice: "He's back! He's materialized again!"

**T**HEN I saw Dr. Petrius Corput's flushed, reddish face, his bright eyes, his bald head, the white lab coat... he was standing a little away from the table, staring down at me... his assistants were gathered behind him... his eyes were very wide, and looked almost frightened.

"Hello, Doc," I said.

He said, "You—you disappeared! Vanished! There was nothing—for three whole minutes! We timed it! And during those three minutes the whole building shook... trembled... vibrated..."

I sat up. I smiled, a little wearily. Perhaps some of the complete understanding of the involute curve was still hanging on. I *did* feel a tremendous insight, at least in that particular moment. I knew that Corput and the rest had been given a good scare, and from now on they'd take it easier, a lot easier. They'd start all over again and re-examine their ideas of complete control, and complete specialization. And there might even be a chance to cut down some of the terrible, machine-like compartmentation that was already in the world. That would be something I could work for. I'd know what I was fighting, now, because I'd already had a good look at the pushbutton way of life back there—someplace in nowhere—

Abruptly the mood wore off. I was my old self again and the feeling of insight was gone. I had left the table, and they were all gathering about, throwing a thousand and one questions at me. I waved them off, and went to the bench where my clothes lay. I asked Corput for a cigarette and he quickly gave me one.

I took the first deep drag.

Corput was talking his head off. "Have to study it further...take us weeks to analyze everything...don't know if something went mechanically wrong, or if it was just an effect we didn't anticipate."

"Uh huh," I said disinterestedly.

I remembered, then, how I could be sure that everything back there had really happened. I opened the snap on my money belt. I found the folded piece of paper in my wallet. The formula was there, all right, just as I had penciled it in Central Control.

"What's that?" asked Corput.

"This?" I held it up, and began to slowly crumple it into a wad. "This

is the thing that might put every human being into a pigeonhole. This is the formula that could make this world some day pretty much like the one I've just been to."

"What? What's that?" said Corput.

I put the wad into my mouth, chewed it thoroughly, and swallowed it.

"Mad," said Corput, turning to the others. "Stark mad—"

"No," I said. "Hardly. Have your psychiatrists make an examination, if you insist. Meanwhile—"

Abruptly, the lab door opened and Della O'Brian—Miss O'Brian to the likes of me—came in. She had a sheaf of papers in her hand. She started to say, "Oh, Doctor, I—" and then she saw me sitting there in my hibiscus-covered shorts, and she gulped and reddened. She said, "Excuse me!"

I stared at her. Of course, she was a redhead, and her eyes were gray, not dark—but *in that strong, open face and trim figure I swore I saw a startling resemblance to Staryine!*

Before I could be sure she ducked out again, slamming the door behind her. I made a quick note to see Miss Della O'Brian again. Soon. Often. And at as close a range as possible.

"Well, Tony," Corput was saying, "in any case, we've got a lot of work ahead of us."

I looked at all of them, one by one. I looked at all their pigeonholed, specialist's faces. It might take a lot of time, and a lot of talk to get the truth across to them, but I'd try—I'd spend the rest of my life at it if necessary.

"Yup, Doc," I said, reaching for my trousers, "we sure have."

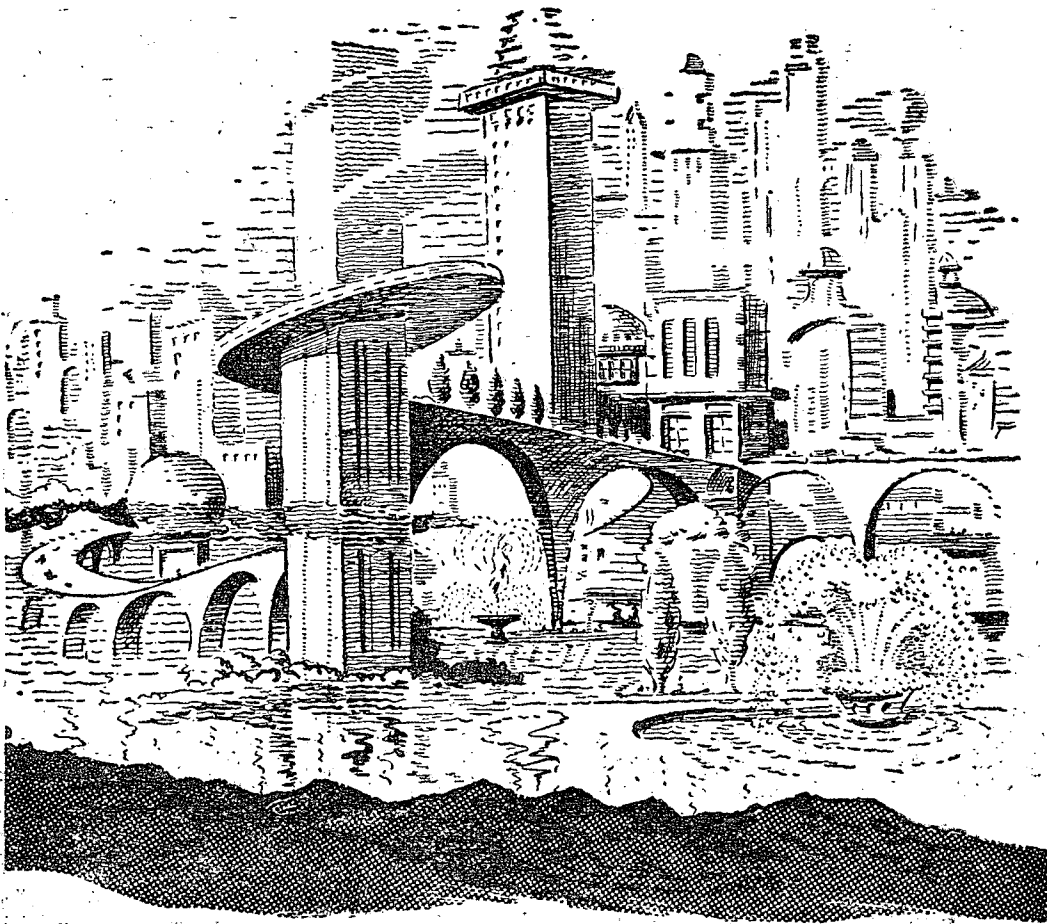
THE END



# SEVEN CAME BACK

*By Clifford D. Simak*

**It was easy for Adam and Eve; but on Mars  
it took seven to maintain the birth rate!**



It couldn't be true: a city's fragile towers shimmered where moments before no city had been!

**T**HEY CAME out of the Martian night, six pitiful little creatures looking for a seventh.

They stopped at the edge of the campfire's lighted circle and stood there, staring at the three Earthmen with their owlish eyes.

The Earthmen froze at whatever they were doing.

"Quiet," said Wampus Smith, talking out of the corner of his bearded lips. "They'll come in if we don't make a move."

From far away came a faint, low moaning, floating in across the wilder-

ness of sand and jagged pinnacles of rock and the great stone buttes.

The six stood just at the firelight's edge. The reflection of the flames touched their fur with highlights of red and blue and their bodies seemed to shimmer against the backdrop of the darkness on the desert.

"Venerables," Nelson said to Richard Webb across the fire.

Webb's breath caught in his throat. Here was a thing he had never hoped to see. A thing that no human being could ever hope to see.

Six of the Venerables of Mars

walking in out of the desert and the darkness, standing in the firelight. There were many men, he knew, who would claim that the race was now extinct, hunted down, trapped out, hounded to extinction by the greed of the human sand men.

The six had seemed the same at first, six beings without a difference; but now, as Webb looked at them, he saw those minor points of bodily variation which marked each one of them as a separate individual. Six of them, Webb thought, and there should be seven.

Slowly they came forward, walking deeper into the campfire's circle. One by one they sat down on the sand facing the three men. No one said a word and the tension built up in the circle of the fire while far toward the north the thing kept up its keening, like a sharp, thin knife blade cutting through the night.

"Human glad," Wampus Smith said finally, talking in the patois of the desert. "He waited long."

One of the creatures spoke, its words half English, half Martian, all of it pure gibberish to the ear that did not know.

"We die," it said. "Human hurt for long. Human help some now. Now we die, human help?"

"Human sad," said Wampus and even while he tried to make his voice sad, there was elation in it, a trembling eagerness, a quivering as a hound will quiver when the scent is hot.

"We are six," the creature said. "Six not enough. We need another one. We do not find the seven, we die. Race die forever now."

"Not forever," Smith told them.

**T**HE VENERABLE insisted on it. "Forever. There other sixes. No other seven."

"How can human help?"

"Human know. Human have Seven somewhere?"

Wampus shook his head.

"Where we have Seven?"

"In cage. On Earth. For human to see."

Wampus shook his head again.

"No Seven on Earth."

"There was one," Webb said softly. "In a zoo."

"Zoo," said the creature, tonguing the unfamiliar word. "We mean that. In cage."

"It died," said Webb. "Many years ago."

"Human have one," the creature insisted. "Here on planet. Hid out. To trade."

"No understand," said Wampus but Webb knew from the way he said it that he understood.

"Find Seven. Do not kill it. Hide it. Knowing we come. Knowing we pay."

"Pay? What pay?"

"City," said the creature. "Old city."

"That's your city," Nelson said to Webb. "The ruins you are hunting."

"Too bad we haven't got a Seven," Wampus said. "We could hand it over and they'd lead us to the ruins."

"Human hurt for long," the creature said. "Human kill all Sevens. Have good fur. Women human wear it. High pay for Seven fur."

"Lord, yes," said Nelson. "Fifty thousand for one at the trading post. A cool half million for a four-skin cape made up in New York."

Webb sickened at the thought of it, at the casual way in which Nelson mentioned it. It was illegal now, of course, but the law had come too late to save the Venerables. Although a law, come to think of it, should not have been necessary. A human being, in all rightness... an intelligent form of life, in all rightness, should not



hunt down and kill another intelligent being to strip off its pelt and sell it for fifty thousand dollars.

"No Seven hid," Wampus was saying. "Law says friends. No dare hurt Seven. No dare hide Seven."

"Law far off," said the creature. "Human his own law."

"Not us," said Wampus. "We don't monkey with the law."

And that's a laugh, thought Webb.

"You help?" asked the creature.

"Try, maybe," Wampus told them cagily. "No good, though. You can't find. Human can't find."

"You find. We show city."

"We watch," said Wampus. "Close watch. See Seven, bring it. Where you be?"

"Canyon mouth."

"Good," said Wampus. "Deal?"

"Deal," said the creature.

Slowly the six of them got to their feet and turned back to the night again.

At the edge of the firelit circle they stopped. The spokesman turned back to the three men.

"By," he said.

"Good-by," said Wampus.

Then they were gone, back into the desert.

**T**HE THREE men sat and listened for a long time, not knowing what they listened for, but with ears taut to hear the slightest sound, trying to read out of sound some of the movement of life that surged all around the fire.

On Mars, thought Webb, one always listens. That is the survival price. To watch and listen and be still and quiet. And ruthless, too. To strike before another thing can strike. To see or hear a danger and be ready for it, be half a second quicker than it is quick. And to recognize that danger once you see or hear it.

Finally Nelson took up again the

thing he had been doing when the six arrived, whetting his belt knife to a razor sharpness on a pocket whetstone.

The soft, sleek whirr of metal traveling over stone sounded like a heartbeat, a pulse that did not originate within the fire-light circle, but something that came out of the darkness, the pulse and beat of the wilderness itself.

Wampus said: "It's too bad, Lars, that we don't know where to pick us up a Seven."

"Yeah," said Lars.

"Might turn a good deal," Wampus said. "Likely to be treasure in that old city. All the stories say so."

Nelson grunted. "Just stories."

"Stones," said Wampus. "Stones so bright and polished they could put your eyes out. Sacks of them. Tire a man out just packing them away."

"Wouldn't need more than one load," Nelson declared. "Just one load would set you up for life."

Webb saw that both of them were looking at him, squinting their eyes against the firelight.

He said, almost angrily: "I don't know about the treasure."

"You heard the stories," Wampus said.

Webb nodded. "Let's say it this way. I'm not interested in the treasure. I don't expect to find any."

"Wouldn't mind if you did, would you?" Lars asked.

"It doesn't matter," Webb told him. "One way or the other."

"What do you know about this city?" Wampus demanded and it wasn't just conversation, it was a question asked with an answer expected, for a special purpose. "You been muttering around and dropping hints here and there but you never came cold out and told us."

For a moment, Webb stared at the man. Then he spoke slowly. "Just

this. I figured out where it might be. From a knowledge of geography and geology and some understanding of the rise of cultures. I figured where the grass and wood and water would have been when Mars was new and young. I tried to locate, theoretically, the likeliest place for a civilization to arise. That's all there's to it."

"And you never thought of treasure?"

"I thought of finding out something about the Martian culture," Webb said. "How it rose and why it fell and what it might be like."

Wampus spat. "You aren't even sure there is a city," he said disgustedly.

"Not until just now," said Webb. "Now I know there is."

"From what them little critters said?"

Webb nodded. "From what they said. That's right."

Wampus grunted and was silent.

Webb watched the two across the campfire from him.

They think I'm soft, he thought. They despise me because I'm soft. They would leave me in a minute if it served their purpose or they'd put a knife into me without a second thought if that should serve their purpose... if there was something that I had they wanted.

There had been no choice, he realized. He could not have gone alone into this wilderness, for if he'd tried he probably wouldn't have lived beyond the second day. It took special knowledge to live here and a special technique and a certain kind of mind. A man had to develop a high survival factor to walk into Mars beyond the settlements.

And the settlements now were very far away. Somewhere to the east.

"Tomorrow," Wampus said, "we change directions. We go north instead of west."

Webb said nothing. His hand slid around cautiously and touched the gun at his belt, to make sure that it was there.

IT HAD BEEN a mistake to hire these two, he knew. But probably none of the others would have been better. They were all of a breed, a toughened, vicious band of men who roamed the wilderness, hunting, trapping, mining, taking what they found. Wampus and Nelson had been the only two at the post when he had arrived. All the other sand men had gone a week before, back to their hunting grounds.

At first they had been respectful, almost fawning. But as the days went on they felt surer of their ground and had grown insolent. Now Webb knew that he'd been taken for a sucker. The two stayed at the post, he knew now, for no other reason than that they were without a grubstake. He was that grubstake. He supplied them with the trappings they needed to get back into the wilderness. Once he had been a grubstake, now he was a burden.

"I said," declared Wampus, "that tomorrow we go north."

Webb still said nothing.

"You heard me, didn't you?" asked Wampus.

"The first time," Webb said.

"We go north," said Wampus, "and we travel fast."

"You got a Seven staked out somewhere?"

Lars snickered. "Ain't that the damndest thing you ever heard of? Takes seven of them. Now with us, it just takes a man and woman."

"I asked you," said Webb to Wampus, "if you have a Seven caged up somewhere?"

"No," said Wampus. "We just go north, that's all."

"I hired you to take me west."

Wampus snarled at him. "I thought you'd say that, Webb. I just wanted to know exactly how you felt about it."

"You want to leave me stranded here," said Webb. "You took my money and agreed to guide me. Now you have something else to do. You either have a Seven or you think you know where you can find one. And if I knew and talked, you would be in danger. So there's only one of two things that you can do with me. You can kill me or you can leave me and let something else do the job for you."

Lars said: "We're giving you a choice, ain't we?"

Webb looked at Wampus and the man nodded. "You got your choice, Webb."

He could go for his gun, of course. He could get one of them, most likely, before the other one got him. But there would be nothing gained. He would be just as dead as if they shot him out of hand. As far as that went he was as good as dead anyhow, for hundreds of miles stretched between him and the settlements and even if he were able to cross those many miles there was no guarantee that he could find the settlements.

"We're moving out right now," said Wampus. "Ain't smart to travel in the dark, but ain't the first time that we had to do it. We'll be up north in a day or two."

Lars nodded. "Once we get back to the settlements, Webb, we'll h'ist a drink to you."

Wampus joined in the spirit of the moment. "Good likker, Webb. We can afford good likker then."

WEBB SAID nothing, did not move. He sat on the ground, relaxed.

And that, he told himself, was the thing that scared him. That he could

sit and know what was about to happen and be so unconcerned about it.

Perhaps it had been the miles of wilderness that made it possible, the harsh, raw land and the vicious life that moved across the land...the ever-hungering, ever-hunting life that prowled and stalked and killed. Here life was stripped to its essentials and one learned that the line between life and death was a thin line at best.

"Well," said Wampus finally, "what will it be, Webb."

"I think," said Webb, gravely, "I think I'll take my chance on living."

Lars clucked his tongue against his teeth. "Too bad," he said. "We was hoping it'd be the other way around. Then we could take all the stuff. As it is, we got to leave you some."

"You can always sneak back," said Webb, "and shoot me as I sit here. It would be an easy thing."

"That," said Wampus, "is not a bad idea."

Lars said: "Give me your gun, Webb. I'll throw it back to you when we leave. But we ain't taking a chance of you plugging us while we're getting ready."

Webb lifted his gun out of its holster and handed it over. Still sitting where he was, he watched them pack and stow the supplies into the wilderness wagon.

Finally it was done.

"We're leaving you plenty to last," Wampus told him. "More than enough."

"Probably," said Webb. "You figure I can't last very long."

"If it was me," said Wampus, "I'd take it quick and easy."

Webb sat for a long time, listening to the motor of the wagon until it was out of hearing, then waiting for the gun blast that would send him toppling face forward into the flaming campfire.

But finally he knew that it would

not come. He piled more fuel on the fire and crawled into his sleeping bag.

**I**N THE morning he headed east, following backward along the tracks of the wilderness wagon. They'd guide him, he knew, for a week or so, but finally they would disappear, brushed out by drifting sand and by the action of the weak and whining wind that sometimes blew across the bleakness of the wilderness.

Anyhow, while he followed them he would know at least he was going in the right direction. Although more than likely he would be dead before they faded out, for the wilderness crawled with too much sudden death to be sure of living from one moment to the next.

He walked with the gun hanging in his hand, watching every side, stopping at the top of the ridges to study the terrain in front of him before he moved down into it.

The unaccustomed pack which he had fashioned inexpertly out of his sleeping bag grew heavier as the day progressed and chafed his shoulders raw. The sun was warm... as warm as the night would be cold... and thirst mounted in his throat to choke him. Carefully he doled out sips of water from the scanty supply the two had left him.

He knew he would not get back. Somewhere between where he stood and the settlements he would die of lack of water or of an insect bite or beneath the jaws and fangs of some charging beast or from sheer exhaustion.

There was, once you thought it out, no reason why a man should try to get back... since there was utterly no chance that he would get back. But Webb didn't stop to reason it out; he set his face toward the east

and followed the wagon tracks.

For there was a *humanness* in him that said he must try at least... that he must go as far as he could go, that he must avoid death as long as he could. So on he went, going as far as he could go and avoiding death.

He spotted the ant colony in time to circle it, but he circled it too closely and the insects, catching scent of food within their grasp, streamed out after him. It took a mile of running before he outdistanced them.

He saw the crouching beast camouflaged against the sand, where it was waiting for him, and shot it where it lay. Later in the day, when another monstrosity came tearing out from behind a rock outcropping, his bullet caught it between the eyes before it had covered half the distance.

For an hour he squatted, unmoving, on the sand, while a huge insect that looked like a bumblebee, but wasn't, hunted for the thing that it had sighted only a moment before. But since it could recognize a thing through motion only, it finally gave up and went away. Webb stayed squatting for another half hour against the chance that it had not gone away, but was lurking somewhere watching for the motion it had sighted to take up again.

These times he avoided death, but he knew that the hour would come when he would not see a danger, or having seen it, would not move fast enough to stop it.

**T**HE MIRAGES came to haunt him, to steal his eyes from the things that he should be watching. Mirages that flickered in the sky, with their feet upon the ground. Tantalizing pictures of things that could not be on Mars, of places that might have been at one time... but that very long ago.

Mirages of broad, slow rivers with the slant of sail upon them. Mirages

of green forests that stretched across the hills and so clear, so close that one could see the little clumps of wild flowers that grew among the trees. And in some of them the hint of snow-capped mountains, in a world that knew no mountains.

He kept a watch for fuel as he went along, hoping to find a cache of "embalmed" wood cropping out of the sand... wood left over from that dim age when these hills and valleys had been forest covered, wood that had escaped the ravages of time and now lay like the dried mummies of trees in the aridness of the desert.

But there was none to be found and he knew that more than likely he would have to spend a fireless night. He could not spend a night in the open without fire. If he tried it, he would be gobbled up an hour after twilight had set in.

He must somehow find shelter in one of the many caves of the weird rock formations that sprang out of the desert. Find a cave and clean out whatever might be in it, block its entrance with stones and boulders and sleep with gun in hand.

It had sounded easy when he thought of it; but while there were many caves, he was forced to reject them one by one since each of them had too large an opening to be closed against attack. A cave, he knew, with an unclosed mouth, would be no better than a trap.

The sun was less than an hour high when he finally spotted a cave that would serve the purpose, located on a ledge of stone jutting out of a steep hill.

From the bottom he stood long minutes surveying the hill. Nothing moved. There was no telltale flecks of color.

Slowly, he started up, digging his feet into the shifting talus of the slope, fighting his way up foot by foot, stop-

ping for long minutes to regain his breath and to survey the slope ahead.

Gaining the ledge, he moved cautiously toward the cave, gun leveled, for there was no telling what might come out of it.

He debated on his next move.

Flash his light inside to see what was there?

Or simply thrust his gun into the opening and spray the inside with its lethal charge?

There could be no squeamishness, he told himself. Better to kill a harmless thing than to run the chance of passing up a danger.

He heard no sound until the claws of the thing were scrabbling on the ledge behind him. He shot one quick glance over his shoulder and saw the beast almost on top of him, got the impression of gaping mouth and murderous fangs and tiny eyes that glinted with a stony cruelty.

There was no time to turn and fire. There was time for just one thing.

**H**IS LEGS moved like driving pistons, hurling his body at the cave. The stone lip of it caught his shoulder and ripped through his clothing, gashing his arm, but he was through, through and rolling free. Something brushed his face and he rolled over something that protested in a squeaking voice and off in one corner there was a thing that mewed quietly to itself.

On his knees, Webb swung his gun around to face the opening of the cave, saw the great bulk of the beast that had charged him trying to squeeze its way inside.

It backed away and then a great paw came in, feeling this way and that, hunting for the food that crouched inside the cave.

Mouths jabbered at Webb, a dozen voices speaking in the lingo of the



desert and he heard them say:

"Human, human, kill, kill, kill."

Webb's gun spat and the paw went limp and was pulled slowly from the cave. The great grey body toppled and they heard it strike the slope below the ledge and go slithering away down the talus-slope.

"Thanks, human," said the voices. "Thanks, human."

Slowly Webb sat down, cradling the gun in his lap.

All around him he heard the stir of life.

Sweat broke out on his forehead and he felt moisture running from his armpits down his sides.

What was in the cave? What was in here with him?

That they had talked to him didn't mean a thing. Half the so-called animals of Mars could talk the desert lingo... a vocabulary of a few hundred words, part of them Earthian, part of them Martian, part of them God-knew-what.

For here on Mars many of the animals were not animals at all, but simply degenerating forms of life that at one time must have formed a complex civilization. The Venerables, who still retained some of the shape of bipeds, would have reached the highest culture, but there must have been many varying degrees of culture, living by compromise or by tolerance.

"Safe," a voice told him. "Trust. Cave law."

"Cave law?"

"Kill in cave...no. Kill outside cave...yes. Safe in cave."

"I no kill," said Webb. "Cave law good."

"Human know cave law?"

Webb said: "Human keep cave law."

"Good," the voice told him. "All safe now."

Webb relaxed. He slipped his gun

into his holster and took off his pack, laid it down alongside and rubbed his raw and blistered shoulders.

He could believe these things, he told himself. A thing so elemental and so simple as cave law was a thing that could be understood and trusted. It arose from a basic need, the need of the weaker life forms to forget their mutual differences and their mutual preying upon one another at the fall of night...the need to find a common sanctuary against the bigger and the more vicious and the lonely killers who took over with the going of the sun.

A voice said: "Come light. Human kill."

Another voice said: "Human keep cave law in dark. No cave law in light. Human kill come light."

"Human no kill come light," said Webb.

"All human kill," said one of the things. "Human kill for fur. Human kill for food. We fur. We food."

"This human never kill," said Webb. "This human friend."

"Friend?" one of them asked. "We not know friend. Explain friend."

Webb didn't try. There was no use, he knew. They could not understand the word. It was foreign to this wilderness.

At last he asked: "Rocks here?"

One of the voices answered: "Rocks in cave. Human want rocks?"

"Pile-in cave mouth," said Webb. "No killer get in."

They digested that for awhile. Finally one of them spoke up: "Rock good."

They brought rocks and stones and, with Webb helping them, wedged the cave mouth tight.

IT WAS TOO dark to see the things, but they brushed against him as they worked and some of them were soft and furry and others had hides

like crocodiles, that tore his skin as he brushed against them. And there was one that was soft and pulpy and gave him the creeps.

He settled down in one corner of the cave with his sleeping bag between his body and the wall. He would have liked to crawl into it, but that would have meant unpacking and if he unpacked his supplies, he knew, there'd be none come morning.

Perhaps, he reasoned, the body heat of all the things in here will keep the cave from getting too cold. Cold, yes, but not too cold for human life. It was, he knew, a gamble at best.

Sleep at night in friendship, kill one another and flee from one another with the coming of the dawn. Law, they called it. Cave law. Here was one for the books, here was something that was not even hinted at in all the archaeological tomes that he had ever read.

And he had read them all. There was something here on Mars that fascinated him. A mystery and a loneliness, an emptiness and a retrogression that haunted him and finally sent him out to try to pierce some of that mystery, to try to hunt for the reason for that retrogression, to essay to measure the greatness of the culture that in some far dim period had come tumbling down.

There has been some great work done along that line. Axelson with his scholarly investigation of the symbolic water jugs and Mason's sometimes fumbling attempt to trace the great migrations. Then there was Smith, who had traveled the barren world for years jotting down the wind-blown stories whispered by the little degenerating things about an ancient greatness and a golden past. Myths, most of them, of course, but some place, somewhere lay the answer to the origin of the myths. Folklore does

not leap full-blown from the mind; it starts with a fact and that fact is added to and the two facts are distorted and you have a myth. But at the bottom, back of all of it, is the starting point of fact.

So it was, so it must be with the myth that told about the great and glowing city that had stood above all other things of Mars... a city that was known to the far ends of the planet.

A place of culture, Webb told himself, a place where all the achievements and all the dreams and every aspiration of the once-great planet would have come together.

And yet, in more than a hundred years of hunting and of digging, Earth's archaeologists had found no trace of any city, let alone that city of all cities. Kitchen middens and burial places and wretched huddling places where broken remnants of the great people had lived for a time... there were plenty of these. But no great city.

It must be somewhere, Webb was convinced. That myth could not lie, for it was told too often at too many different places by too many different animals that had once been people.

Mars fascinated me, he thought, and it still fascinates me, but now it will be the death of me... for there's death in its fascination. Death in the lonely stretches and death waiting on the buttes. Death in this cave, too, for they may kill me come the morning to prevent me killing them; they may keep their truce of the night just long enough to make an end of me.

The law of the cave? Some hold-over from the ancient day, some memory of a now forgotten brotherhood? Or a device necessitated by the evil days that had come when the brother-

hood had broken?

HE LAID his head back against the rock and closed his eyes and thought. . . if they kill me, they kill me, but I will not kill them. For there has been too much human killing on the planet Mars. I will repay part of the debt at least. I will not kill the ones who took me in.

He remembered himself creeping along the ledge outside the cave, debating whether he should have a look first or stick in the muzzle of his gun and sweep the cave as a simple way of being sure there would be nothing there to harm him.

I did not know, he said. I did not know.

A soft furry body brushed against him and a voice spoke to him.

"Friend means no hurt? Friend means no kill?"

"No hurt," said Webb. "No kill."

"You saw six?" the voice asked.

Webb jerked from the wall and sat very still.

"You saw six?" the voice was insistent.

"I saw six," said Webb.

"When?"

"One sun."

"Where six?"

"Canyon mouth," said Webb. "Wait at canyon mouth."

"You hunt Seven?"

"No," said Webb. "I go home."

"Other humans?"

"They north," said Webb. "They hunt Seven north."

"They kill Seven?"

"Catch seven," said Webb. "Take Seven to six. See city."

"Six promise?"

"Six promise," said Webb.

"You good human. You friend human. You no kill Seven."

"No kill," insisted Webb.

"All humans kill. Kill Seven sure. Seven good fur. Much pay. Many

Sevens die for human."

"Law says no kill," declared Webb. "Human law says Seven friend. No kill friend."

"Law? Like cave law?"

"Like cave law," said Webb.

"You good friend of Seven?"

"Good friend of all," said Webb.

"I Seven," said the voice.

Webb sat quietly and let the numbness clear out of his brain.

"Seven," he finally said. "You go canyon mouth. Find six. They wait. Human friend glad."

"Human friend want city," said the creature. "Seven friend to human. Human find Seven. Human see city. Six promise."

Webb almost laughed aloud in bitterness. Here, at last, the chance that he had hoped might come. Here, at last, the thing that he had wanted, the thing he had come to Mars to do. And he couldn't do it. He simply couldn't do it.

"Human no go," he said. "Human die. No food. No water. Human die."

"We care for human," Seven told him. "No friend human before. All kill humans. Friend-human come. We care for it."

Webb was silent for a while, thinking.

Then he asked: "You give human food? You find human water?"

"Take care," said Seven.

"How Seven know I saw six?"

"Human tell. Human think. Seven know."

So that was it...telepathy. Some vestige of a former power, some attribute of a magnificent culture, not quite forgotten yet. How many of the other creatures in this cave would have it, too?

"Human go with Seven?" Seven asked.

"Human go," said Webb.

He might as well, he told himself. Going east, back toward the settle-

mients, was no solution to his problem. He knew he'd never reach the settlements. His food would run out. His water would run out. Some beast would catch him and make a meal of him. He didn't have a chance.

Going with the little creature that stood beside him in the darkness of the cave, he might have a chance. Not too good a chance, perhaps, but at least a chance. There would be food and water... or at least a chance of food and water. There would be another helping him to watch for the sudden death that roamed the wilderness. Another one to warn him, to help him recognize the danger.

"Human cold," said Seven.

"Cold," admitted Webb.

"One cold," said Seven. "Two warm."

The furry thing crawled into his arms, put its arms around his body. After a moment, he put his arms around it.

"Sleep," said Seven. "Warm. Sleep."

WEBB ATE the last of his food and the Seven Venerables told him: "We care."

"Human die," Webb insisted. "No food. Human die."

"We take care," the seven little creatures told him, standing in a row. "Later we take care."

So he took it to mean that there was no food for him now, but later there would be.

They took up the march again.

It was an interminable thing, that march. A thing to make a man cry out in his sleep. A thing to shiver over when they had been lucky enough to find wood and sat hunched around the fire. Day after endless day of sand and rock, of crawling up to a high ridge and plunging down the other side, of slogging through the heat across the level land that had been

sea bottom in the days long gone.

It became a song, a drum beat, a three-note marching cadence that rang through the human's head, an endless thing that hammered in his brain through the day and stayed with him hours after they had stopped for night. Until he was dizzy with it, until his brain was drugged with the hammer of it, so that his eyes refused to focus and the gun bead was a fuzzy globe when he had to use the weapon against the crawling things and charging things and flying things that came at them out of nowhere.

Always there were the mirages, the everlasting mirages of Mars that seemed to lie just beneath the surface of reality. Flickering pictures painted in the sky the water and the trees and the long green sweep of grass that Mars had not known for countless centuries. As if, Webb told himself, the past were very close behind them, as if the past might still exist and was trying to catch up, reluctant to be left behind in the march of time.

He lost count of the days and steeled himself against the speculation of how much longer it might be, until it seemed that it would go on forever, that they would never stop, that they would face each morning the barren wilderness they must stagger through until the fall of night.

He drank the last of the water and reminded them he could not live without it.

"Later," they told him. "Water later."

THAT WAS the day they came to the city and there, deep in a tunnel far beneath the topmost ruins there was water, water dripping, drop by slow and tantalizing drop from a broken pipe. Dripping water and that was a wondrous thing on Mars.

The seven drank sparingly since they had been steeled for century upon century to get along with little water, until they had adapted themselves to get along with little water and it was no hardship for them. But Webb lay for hours beside the broken pipe, holding cupped hands for a little to collect before he lapped it down, lying there in the coolness that was a blessed thing.

He slept and awoke and drank again and he was rested and was no longer thirsty; but his body cried for food. And there was no food nor none to get him food. For the little ones were gone.

They will come back, he said. They are gone for just a little while and will be back again. They have gone to get me food and they will bring it to me. And he thought very kindly of them.

He picked his way upward through the tunnel down which they'd come and so at last came to the ruins that lay on the hill that thrust upward from the surrounding country so that when one stood on the hill's top, there was miles of distance, dropping away on every side.

There wasn't much that one could see of the ruined city. It would have been entirely possible to have walked past the hill and not have known the city was there. During thousands of years it had crumbled and fallen in upon itself and some of it had dissolved to dust and the sand had crept in and covered it and sifted among its fragments until it simply was a part of the hill.

Here and there Webb found broken fragments of chiseled masonry and here and there a shard of pottery, but a man could have walked past these, if he had not been looking, and taken them for no more than another rock scattered among the trillions of other fragmentary rocks littered on the sur-

face of the planet.

The tunnel, he found, led down into the bowels of the fallen city, into the burial mound of the fallen greatness and the vanished glory of a proud people whose descendants now scuttled animal-like in the ancient deserts and talked in an idiom that was no more than a memory of the literacy that must have flourished once in the city on the hill.

In the tunnel Webb found evidence of solid blocks of carven stone, broken columns, paving blocks and something that seemed at one time to have been a beautifully executed statue.

At the end of the tunnel, he cupped his hands at the pipe and drank again, then went back to the surface and sat on the ground beside the tunnel mouth and stared out across the emptiness of Mars.

It would take power and tools and many men to uncover and sift the evidence of the city. It would take years of painstaking, scholarly work ... and he didn't even have a shovel. And worst of all, he had no time. For if the seven did not show up with food he would one day go down into the darkness of the tunnel and there eventually join his human dust with the ancient dust of this alien world.

There had been a shovel, he remembered, and Wampus and Lars, when they deserted him, had left it for him. A rare consideration, surely, he told himself. But of the supplies which he had carried away from the campfire that long gone morning there were just two things left, his sleeping bag and the pistol at his belt. All else he could get along without, those two were things that he had to have.

An archaeologist, he thought. An archaeologist sitting on top of the greatest find that any archaeologist had ever made and not able to do a single thing about it.



Wampus and Lars had thought that there would be treasure here. And there was no certain treasure, no treasure revealed and waiting for the hands of men to take. He had thought of glory and there was no glory. He had thought of knowledge and without a shovel and some time there simply was no knowledge. No knowledge beyond the bare knowing that he had been right, that the city did exist.

And yet there was certain other knowledge gained along the way. The knowledge that the seven types of the Venerables did still in fact exist, that from this existence the race might still continue despite the guns and snares and the greed and guile of Earthmen who had hunted Seven for its fifty thousand dollar pelt.

Seven little creatures, seven different sexes. All of them essential to the continuance of the race. Six little creatures looking for the seventh and he had found the seventh. Because he had found the seventh, because he had been the messenger, there would be at least one new generation of the Venerables to carry on the race.

What use, he thought, to carry on a race that had failed its purpose?

He shook his head.

You can't play God, he said. You can't presume to judge. There either is a purpose in all things or there's no purpose in anything, and who is there to know?

There either is purpose that I reached this city or there is no purpose. There is a purpose that I may die here or it is possible that my dying here will be no more than another random factor in the great machination of pure chance that moves the planets through their courses and brings a man homeward at the end of day.

And there was another knowledge ...the knowledge of the endless

reaches and the savage loneliness that was the Martian wilderness. The knowledge of that and the queer, almost non-human detachment that it fused into the human soul.

Lessons, he thought.

The lesson that one man is an insignificant flyspeck crawling across the face of eternity. The lesson that one life is a relatively unimportant thing when it stands face to face with the over-riding reality of the miracle of all creation.

He got up and stood at his full height and knew his insignificance and his humility in the empty sweep of land that fell away on every side and in the arching sky that vaulted overhead from horizon to horizon, and the utter silence that lay upon the land and sky.

**S**TARVING was a lonely and an awful business.

Some deaths are swift and clean.

But starving is not one of these.

The seven did not come. Webb waited for them, and because he still felt kindly toward them, he found excuses for them. They did not realize, he told himself, how short a time a man may go without nourishment. The strange mating, he told himself, involving seven personalities, probably was a complicated procedure and might take a great deal more time than one usually associated with such phenomena. Or something might have happened to them, they might be having trouble of their own. As soon as they had worked it out, they would come, and they would bring him food.

So he starved with kindly thoughts and with a great deal more patience than a man under dissimilar circumstances might be expected to.

And he found, even when he felt the lassitude of under-nourishment creeping along his muscles and his bones, even when the sharp pangs of

hunger had settled to a gnawing horror that never left him, even when he slept, that his mind was not affected by the ravages that his body was undergoing; that his brain, apparently, was sharpened by the lack of food, that it seemed to step aside from his tortured body and become a separate entity that drew in upon itself and knotted all its faculties into a hard-bound bundle that was scarcely aware of external factors.

He sat for long hours upon a polished rock, perhaps part of that once proud city, which he found just a few yards from the tunnel mouth, and stared out across the sun-washed wilderness which stretched for miles toward a horizon that it never seemed to reach. He sought for purpose with a sharp-edged mind that probed at the roots of existence and of happenstance and sought to evolve out of the random factors that moved beneath the surface of the universe's orderliness some evidence of a pattern that would be understandable to the human mind. Often he thought he had it, but it always slid away from him like quicksilver escaping from a clutching hand.

If Man ever was to find the answer, he knew, it must be in a place like this, where there was no distraction, where there was a distance and a barrenness that built up to a vast impersonality which emphasized and underscored the inconsequence of the thinker. For if the thinker introduced himself as a factor out of proportion to the fact, then the whole problem was distorted and the equation, if equation there be, never could be solved.

**A**T FIRST he had tried to hunt animals for food, but strangely, while the rest of the wilderness swarmed with vicious life that hunted timid life, the area around the city

was virtually deserted, as if some one had drawn a sacred chalk mark around it. On his second day of hunting he killed a small thing that on Earth could have been a mouse. He built a fire and cooked it and later hunted up the sun-dried skin and sucked and chewed at it for the small nourishment that it might contain. But after that he did not kill a thing, for there was nothing to be killed.

Finally he came to know the seven would not come, that they never had intended to come, that they had deserted him exactly as his two human companions had deserted him before. He had been made a fool, he knew, not once, but twice.

He should have kept on going east after he had started. He should not have come back with seven to find the other six who waited at the canyon's mouth.

You might have made it to the settlements, he told himself. You just might have made it. Just possibly have made it.

East. East toward the settlements.

Human history is a trying... a trying for the impossible, and attaining it. There is no logic, for if humanity had waited upon logic it still would be a cave-lining and an earth-bound race.

Try, said Webb, not knowing exactly what he said.

He walked down the hill again and started out across the wilderness, heading toward the east. For there was no hope upon the hill and there was hope toward the east.

A mile from the base of the hill, he fell. He staggered, falling and rising, for another mile. He crawled a hundred yards. It was there the seven found him.

"Food!" he cried at them and he had a feeling that although he cried it in his mind there was no sound in

his mouth. "Food! Water!"

"We take care," they said, and lifted him, holding him in a sitting position.

"Life," Seven told him, "is in many husks. Like nested boxes that fit inside each other. You live one and you peel it off and there's another life."

"Wrong," said Webb. "You do not talk like that. Your thought does not flow like that. There is something wrong."

"There is an inner man," said seven. "There are many inner men."

"The subconscious," said Webb and while he said it in his mind, he knew that no word, no sound came out of his mouth. And he knew now, too, that no words were coming out of Seven's mouth, that here were words that could not be expressed in the patois of the desert, that here were thoughts and knowledge that could not belong to a thing that scuttled, fearsome, through the Martian wilderness.

"You peel an old life off and you step forth in a new and shining life," said Seven, "but you must know the way. There is a certain technique and a certain preparation. If there is no preparation and no technique, the job is often bungled."

"Preparation," said Webb. "I have no preparation. I do not know about this."

"You are prepared," said Seven. "You were not before, but now you are."

"I thought," said Webb.

"You thought," said Seven, "and you found a partial answer. Well-fed, earth-bound, arrogant, there would have been no answer. You found humility."

"I do not know the technique," said Webb. "I do not..."

"We know the technique," Seven said. "We take care."

The hilltop where the dead city lay shimmered and there was a mirage on it. Out of the dead mound of its dust rose the pinnacles and spires, the buttresses and the flying bridges of a city that shone with color and with light; out of the sand came the blaze of garden beds of flowers and the tall avenues of trees and a music that came from the slender bell towers.

There was grass beneath his feet instead of sand blazing with the heat of the Martian noon. There was a path that led up the terraces of the hill toward the wonder city that reared upon its heights. There was the distant sound of laughter and there were flecks of color moving on the distant streets and along the walls and through the garden paths.

Webb swung around and the seven were not there. Nor was the wilderness. The land stretched away on every hand and it was not wilderness, but a breath-taking place with groves of trees and roads and flowing water courses.

He turned back to the city again and watched the movement of the flecks of color.

"People," he said.

And Seven's voice, coming to him from somewhere, from elsewhere, said:

"People from the many planets. And from beyond the planets. And some of your own people you will find among them. For you are not the first."

Filled with wonder, a wonder that was fading, that would be entirely faded before he reached the city, Webb started walking up the path.

**W**AMPUS SMITH and Lars Nelson came to the hill many days late. They came on foot because the wilderness wagon had broken down. They came without food except the

little food they could kill along the way and they came with no more than a few drops of water sloshing in their canteens and there was no water to be found.

There, a short distance from the foot of the hill, they found the sun-dried mummy of a man face downward on the sand and when they turned him over they saw who he was.

Wampus stared across the body at Lars.

"How did he get here?" he croaked.

"I don't know," said Lars. "He never could have made it, not knowing the country and on foot. And he wouldn't have traveled this way anyhow. He would have headed east, back to the settlements."

They pawed through his clothing and found nothing. But they took his gun, for the charges in their own were running very low.

"What's the use," said Lars. "We

can't make it, Wampus."

"We can try," said Wampus.

Above the hill a mirage flickered... a city with shining turrets and dizzy pinnacles and rows of trees and fountains that flashed with leaping water. To their ears came the sound, or seemed to come, the sound of many bells.

Wampus spat with lips that were cracked and dried, spat with no saliva in his mouth.

"Them damn mirages," he said.

"They drive a man half crazy."

"They seem so close," said Lars.

"So close and real. As if they were someplace else and were trying to break through."

Wampus spat again. "Let's get going," he said.

The two men turned toward the east and as they moved, they left staggering, uneven tracks through the sand of Mars.

THE END

## NITROGEN TORCH



by WILLIAM KARNEY



**O**UTSIDE OF the interior of an atomic bomb, a hydrogen bomb, or the sun itself, it is impossible to obtain high temperatures comparable with these. Such things as the electric arc, the oxy-acetylene torch, the gas furnaces—all are cool compared with such intense heat sources. But high temperatures are very useful in research. To obtain them is the problem. You can't perform an experiment in the interior of an exploding atomic bomb!

A new source of high temperature has been announced. It is called the atomic nitrogen torch and bears a relationship to the former atomic hydrogen torch. The latter you recall is simply an electric arc through which hydrogen gas passes. The gas is broken up from H-two to simple H-atoms, by the electric arc. When the atoms recombine a small distance away from the arc, they give back the heat

necessary to disrupt them. As a result the atomic hydrogen torch provided one of the hottest flames known to man.

The atomic nitrogen torch works in a similar manner except that high frequency radio waves are used instead of the electric arc. The recombining nitrogen atoms deliver up their heat at the best point. The torch is not very impressive looking and unless the object is inserted in the gas stream, no heat is felt. But temperatures hitherto thought unobtainable are available.

Undoubtedly the high temperature source of the future will be some variant of the atomic pile or atomic furnace. Theoretically—and in fact, the internal temperatures of the stars are attainable. These will be harnessed and used in research. It might be added that the temperatures are in the neighborhood of one to twenty-million degrees!

# THE PLANETARY JACKPOT!



by MILTON MATTHEW



IT'S NOT FASHIONABLE any more for philanthropists and private citizens to go around offering prizes for scientific discoveries. Today to win anything you've got to get on a quiz program. But it wasn't always that way. Once upon a time, you could win money for making discoveries, yes, real money too!

Probably the best known of the rewards offered for scientific discoveries is the mathematical award offered for the solution of a complicated and difficult equation known as "Fermat's." The award was put up before the first World War by a German industrialist but it was never claimed. The solution appears to be impossible.

Not so well known but charming in a quaint sort of way is French offering known as the "Prix Pierre Guzman." This reward was offered about sixty years ago and it is still available. It will be awarded by the French Academy of

Sciences, that gray-bearded, learned body, which passes on all things French. The prize is for first establishing *communication with the planets!*

The prize offered is a hundred thousand francs—just about the same in grubnicks—a mere two hundred odd dollars. This sad amount is due to the devaluation of the franc over the last sixty years—it once amounted to close to twenty-five thousand dollars!—which ain't hay in anybody's language.

Madame Guzman who established the prize insisted that Mars be excluded from the potential communicator's list because it would be too easy a matter to contact that planet! Talk about being naive...

Maybe the habit of offering rewards in science will be revived. The government's step in offering money to discoverers of uranium deposits is a hopeful step in the right direction.

## PLEASANT DREAMS



by A. MORRIS



HAVE YOU ever wondered how different animals sleep? They have a variety of sleeping habits. Many snakes awake at noon, crawl around a bit, and go back to sleep at two o'clock and sleep till noon the next day. But the rabbit is much different in that he takes as many as sixteen naps a day. Many animals don't make much fuss about a bed either. They just "turn in" where ever they happen to be. Gorillas go to much trouble to make a bed just right, and each night they find a new place to sleep. The orangutan sleeps way up in the tallest trees where he makes a nice bed out of the branches.

Elephants seem to fear that their resting places will be destroyed by other elephants, and so they don't often lie down while they sleep. Some have frightening nightmares which cause them to bellow in their sleep. Some queer birds sleep in snowdrifts in little igloo nests. Gulls and geese can sleep while they are bouncing on the waves. It isn't known whether fish sleep or not, but their habits have been observed in aquariums. Most fish sink to the bottom of the tank and turn on their sides when the lights are turned off. They stay in that position until the lights go on again.

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## FOOD FOR THE MIND



by CAL WEBB



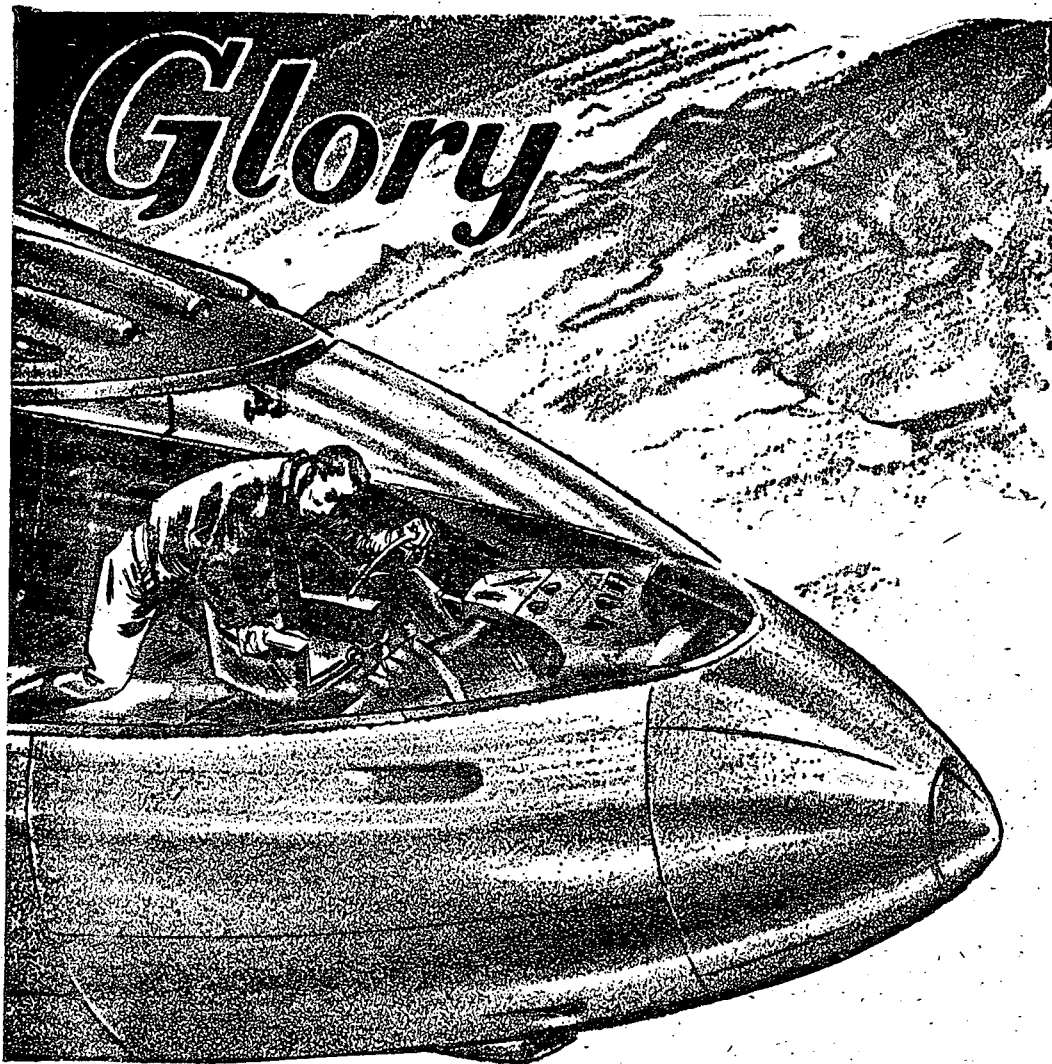
THE FIRST and most important tools of any scientific or engineering group are books. Why? Because books represent the recorded thought processes of minds. Without libraries, references, and other educational facilities there is no possibility of setting science really into motion.

Therefore the Library of Congress, The American Library Association, The U. S. Book Exchange, The UN Committee and others are sending shipments of books to the war-devastated libraries of the world. These books are mostly technical and educational and are going to Asia and Europe. Through private funds donated by Americans of all classes and types, this "CARE" program, this "food for the mind" organization is trying to rebuild the shattered intellectual monuments.

There can be no finer contribution to a society than to build a library. For it is in libraries that the stimulus and intellectual nourishment of the thinker and the scientist is found. Our country, richest in the world in terms of intellectual and student facilities, is now attempting to help the rest of the world. Maybe a sort of international Utopia will arrive—ahead of the first atomic bomb, we hope!







**Crag managed to steal a fortune—  
only to find that what it would buy  
was too rotten even for a crook. . . .**

**T**HERE was this Crag, and he was a criminal and a killer and just about the toughest guy in the solar system. But it wasn't doing him much good right then because he was dying.

He was dying on a world no big-

ger than an orange. It had been an asteroid a little bigger than a house when he'd landed on it—with Jon Olliver and Evadne—less than an hour before.

And when he, Crag, had learned about Olliver's plans, he'd made a

damn fool hero of himself; he'd shoved the spaceship off into space so none of them could get away again, ever. Then he'd managed to kill Olliver before Olliver had killed him and the atoms that had made up Olliver's body were now one with the collapsed atoms of the asteroid that was now too small a world to live on, but not to die on.

Already the oxygen tank of his space suit was almost empty; he was breathing hard and painfully. Too bad, he thought, that he'd had to destroy the disintegrator instead of using it on himself to shorten the final agony—as Evadne, beautiful Evadne—had been able to do when the air in her space suit had run out.

And Crag was dying now; he'd be dead in ten minutes or maybe five. And it was funny; he wanted to laugh because he had two hundred thousand credits, a fortune, in his pocket. And ten minutes ago, for the first time, he'd had the most beautiful woman he'd ever known in his arms and she had loved him. But you can't spend a fortune on an asteroid, especially one that's been collapsed into neutronium, and you can't get much satisfaction out of loving a woman in a space suit in the void.

Crag laughed. This was a piece with everything that had happened to him since the day, years ago, that he'd lost his rating as a spaceman when he'd lost his left hand cleaning a tube that had accidentally fired. He had been cheated out of his compensation, on a technicality, by the corrupt officialdom of the spaceways. He'd turned criminal then, and had been as ruthless to society as it had been to him. And this wasn't bad, compared to some of the ways he'd almost died, or worse than died, a dozen times before. Dying from lack of oxygen isn't exactly painless, but he'd endured worse pain, and stoically, and

in situations that lacked the anodyne of humor, however bitter humor, that this one had.

A world in his pocket! When the disintegrated asteroid had collapsed into a solid little ball of neutronium, that unbelievably heavy stuff from which some of the stars are made, he'd put it in his pocket. Of course, actually, because of their relative mass, he'd moved his own body in relation to it rather than the other way around, but that was a detail. He took it out of his pocket now and looked at it in the dim light of the distant sun. There on the surface of it were the collapsed atoms that had been Evadne, Evadne of the lushly beautiful body and the hair like burnished copper, the eyes that were a deeper blue than space seen through an atmosphere. No one could recognize her now.

He thought how wonderful it would have been if Evadne had lived and if he were going to live. Or would it? There would have been no place for them, anywhere in the system. Crag sighed and it was such a strange sound that he realized it was the first time he'd done so for years. He was getting soft. Well, it didn't matter now. And it had been a rasping sigh because his body was fighting for breath.

He wished that he had enough control over his body to tell it to stop fighting, but no man, not even one as tough as Crag, can force his lung muscles to quit a struggle for breath.

Suddenly a voice inside his mind said, "What is wrong?" Not the words, but the thought.

IT STARTLED him because he was alone, more alone than he'd ever been before. It was like the way the telepathic semi-savages of Venus spoke to one, yet clearer, even more sharp than that, more nearly like an



actual voice. One you could almost hear.

He looked around him and there was nothing but the void, distant Sol, the stars, and closer but still many miles away, the pinpoint reflections of the asteroids. And out there somewhere, although he couldn't spot it at the moment, was the spaceship he'd pushed away from the asteroid. But nowhere life. Who or what had spoken inside his mind?

He concentrated on the thought: *Who are you?*

"I do not know. I thought to discover the answer from you, but I do not find it in your mind. I find many confused things, but not that. I find pain and the thought that you are going to cease to exist. Why? What is wrong?"

"Oxygen," Crag thought. "I am dying from lack of oxygen."

"Do not think of the word," came the thought in his mind. "Think of the thing itself. I perceive now from your mind that it is a gas, that it is an element. Think of its structure."

Crag was not a physicist, but the atomic structure of oxygen is a comparatively simple one. He thought of it, pictured it.

And suddenly he wasn't fighting for breath any longer; he was breathing normally.

"That is better," came the alien thought. "Now will you think thoughts that will tell me who and what you are, why you are here and what has happened? From that, I can possibly determine who and what I am, how I came to be. I think it will be best if you tell it as though you were talking, but try to think, too, of the meanings of the words as you use them."

Crag said, "All right. I am Crag. A man named Olliver hired me to steal a device from a scientist, one that—I realize now—the scientist had sup-

pressed because it was too dangerous to use; it could have destroyed entire planets. It was a disintegrator; it collapsed atoms into neutronium, setting up a chain reaction in any reasonably homogeneous substance, so that, although tiny, it could have destroyed Earth or Mars or Venus."

"I gave it to Olliver. Three of us—Olliver, his wife Evadne, and I—came here in Olliver's spaceship to try out the device. We landed on an asteroid and used the disintegrator on it; it collapsed, gradually, into a tiny ball of almost infinitely heavy matter, hundreds of tons to the square inch."

"While it was doing so, Olliver told us his plans and we learned that he had lied about them. He intended taking over rule of the solar system through his threat to destroy any planet that opposed him. He would have had to destroy at least one planet to rule the others."

"I learned then that Evadne was against him. She had hated him but had stayed with him because she suspected what his plans were and hoped to stop them. In the showdown, I sided with Evadne."

"Why?" came the thought.

Crag grinned. "I guess I'm not as much of a crook as Olliver was. I've killed plenty of people, but they all needed killing. It's a pretty corrupt place, right now, the solar system. I wouldn't have minded Olliver ruling it; he couldn't have been any worse than those who run it now. But I found out I didn't hate it enough to let a planet or two—and several billion people—be destroyed in order to put him into power. And maybe, too, because I found out that I—" he hesitated at the thought "—loved Evadne."

"Anyway, Olliver tried to kill us and I killed him. Evadne's oxygen ran out first and she used the disintegra-

tor on herself rather than die more slowly. I would have, too, but I had to destroy the disintegrator so it would never be found. That is all until you asked in my mind, 'What is wrong?' All right, now what's this business about you not knowing who you are? How can you not know who you are or even what you are?"

"I am beginning to understand," said the thought in Crag's mind. "Will you concentrate on all you know of—matter, energy and thought?"

**I**T WASN'T a lot, and didn't take long. Crag knew only the general outlines of current theories. He knew more about rocket motors, space-warp, and picking locks.

The thought in his mind said, "I understand, now. I am a new entity, a new consciousness created in the collapse of the atoms of the asteroid upon which the disintegrator was used. Even as matter can be converted to energy through fission, so matter can be converted to consciousness through disintegration."

Crag thought. It seemed possible. He'd wondered what had happened to the energy that had kept the atoms and molecules apart, once they had collapsed into that tiny, incredibly heavy ball he held in his hand. Matter into energy; energy into consciousness. Why not? And why not the third step: could consciousness create matter?

He'd been thinking, but he might as well have spoken aloud. The voice in his mind answered him. "I do not know. Perhaps, a strong enough consciousness. Not mine, any more than yours. No, I did not create oxygen in the tank of your suit. I—think of the word, please. Yes, I transmuted matter that was already there into the form of matter on which you concentrated. I can change the form of matter, I can cause it to move; I can-

not create it. Now, what shall I do for you?"

Crag laughed. An asteroid—yes, he supposed that the ball of collapsed matter in his hand was still an asteroid regardless of its form—was asking him what it could do for him.

"There is a spaceship nearby," he said. "Can you bring it back, or take me to it? It's the ship we came in. I shoved it and the asteroid—you—apart to prevent Olliver from getting away in it."

"Yes, I perceive it. I can move it from here. I am doing so. It is coming toward us."

Crag looked around and saw it: a gray spot in Orion, growing slowly larger. He laughed again; he was going to spend that two hundred thousand dollars after all! Incredibly, he was going to live and to return to civilization, such as it was.

The asteroid caught the thought in his mind. It said, "Think about your civilization, Crag. Concentrate on it, that I may learn about it. It seems a strange, corrupt thing. I do not like it."

Sudden fear hit Crag. He had stopped Olliver's plans to take over and rule the solar system by destroying one or more planets of it. But had something even more dangerous happened? Would—

"No," said the asteroid. "Do not fear that, Crag. I would neither destroy nor rule your race or any other. I am not a monster. I am neither good nor evil. I think that I know what I am going to do, to become. But it will not affect the race to which you belong."

Crag relaxed his mind. Somehow, he knew that that was true.

He thought, "Anyway, do not judge the human race by my opinion of it. I am a criminal, every hand against me and my hand against every man—especially the metal hand that is my



best weapon. Men have treated me badly; I have repaid them in kind. But do not judge them by what I think of them. Perhaps I am more warped than they."

"I do not think so. Please concentrate on how the system is governed."

Crag let his mind think about the two parties—both equally crooked and corrupt—that ran the planets between them, mostly by cynical horse trading methods that betrayed the common people on both sides. The Guilds and the Syndicates—popularly known as the Guilds and the Gildeds—one purporting to represent capital and the other purporting to represent labor, but actually betraying it at every opportunity. Both parties getting together to rig elections so they might win alternately and preserve an outward appearance of a balance of power and a democratic government. Justice, if any, obtainable only by bribery. Objectors or would-be reformers—and there weren't many of either—eliminated by the hired thugs and assassins both parties used. Strict censorship of newspapers, radio and television, extending even to novels lest a writer attempt to slip in a phrase that might imply that the government under which he lived was less than perfect.

Crag thought of instance after instance until the voice in his mind said, "Enough. Your spaceship is here."

He looked around and saw it, the handle of the door was within reach. He opened it and climbed in, the sphere of neutronium that had been an asteroid and was now a sentient being floated gently beside him, obviously managing in some way to neutralize its own mass in relation to that of the spaceship.

Crag turned on the airmaker. The spaceship was too small to have an airlock; on ships of such size it is

more economical to let the air escape when leaving and build up an atmosphere again after return and before removing space suits. He watched the gauge, and while he was waiting for the air pressure to build up, he asked, "What now? What do you wish me to do?"

"You are very tired; you have not slept for several days. I suggest that you sleep."

"And you?"

"I intend to visit the planets to see at first hand what you have told me. I shall return by the time you awaken."

"You mean you can—" Crag started to question, and then stopped. After the powers he had seen the newborn entity exhibit already, he didn't doubt that it could do anything it said it could, even to an investigation of all of the planets and a return within a few hours.

Then it occurred to him that if the sphere was going to leave the ship, he was wasting time building up air pressure; might as well get the opening and closing of the lock over with first. He turned, but the sphere didn't seem to be anywhere around. He thought, "Where are you?"

The answering thought inside his brain was very faint. "Three hundred thousand miles toward Mars. Await my return, Crag."

## CHAPTER II

THREE hundred thousand miles, Crag thought, and the sphere couldn't have been gone more than seconds; it must be able to move itself at almost the speed of light! Not by teleportation, either; that would have been instantaneous.

He turned back to the gauge and saw that the air pressure was sufficient; he took off his spacesuit and made sure that the two hundred

thousand credits were still safe in his pocket. Then he sighed with weariness and lay down on one of the twin bunks on either side of the ship.

He was too tired to go directly to sleep, too stunned by all that had happened to wonder much at it. He knew that after he'd slept he'd doubt it all and find the existence of the sphere of neutronium as a living entity incredible. Now he accepted it calmly. He even missed it; it had been companionship out here in the void. Although as a criminal Crag always played a lone hand, he didn't like to be alone at other times, especially out here in the void, probably a million miles from the nearest other human. Not even that near unless the other human or humans were on a spaceship curving around the asteroid belt on a run between one of the inner planets and one of the three habitable moons of Jupiter, the only inhabited bodies outside of the inner planets.

He tried to keep from thinking of Evadne, of how beautiful she was the first time he had seen her, even in the severe costume of a technician, and how impossibly like a flame she had been when he had seen her next, dressed in an evening gown which was little more than a wisp of material above the waist and fitting her hips and thighs like a sheath. He tried not to think of the blue of her eyes or the soft copper of her hair, the creamy smoothness of her skin. And so, of course, he thought of all these things.

He tried not to think of the one time she had kissed him, and his lips burned and then felt cold.

And above all, he tried not to remember that, only hours ago, they had been in one another's arms—in space suits in the void. If only her suit had contained its full supply of oxygen so she could have lived a little longer, as long as he had, until the

awakening intelligence of the newborn entity that had been an asteroid had made mental contact and learned enough of thought and of itself to ask that question, "What is wrong?" that had changed everything.

If only— But why think of futile ifs, now that Evadne was dead? So, of course, he thought of them.

When he got back to Earth—no, to Mars; it was nearer—he'd get himself drunk on some of the most expensive and fancy liquors of the solar system. Then maybe he could quit thinking about her. And you can stay drunk a long time on two hundred thousand credits. You could stay drunk a thousand years on that much money, if you could live that long.

But you can't live at all if you can't sleep, so after a while Crag got up and hunted through the medical compartment until he found some sleeping powders. He took two of them in spite of the "Danger. Take only one," warning on the box.

And after a while he slept.

**H**E AWOKE finally with a dull, lost feeling that he'd seldom had before except in jail. The small narrow bunk, the close confines of the ship to which he opened his eyes seemed like a cell to him. He reached into his pocket to be sure the money was still there and it was.

He wanted a drink worse than he'd ever wanted one in his life. What was he doing on a spaceship drifting idly out here in the void? Why hadn't he taken it into Marsport before he'd slept? Then he could have slept comfortably, luxuriously, in the best suite of the best Marsport hotel with a bottle to help him to sleep and to reach for when he awakened.

He swung his feet off the bunk and sat up. There, floating in the middle of the cabin, was the sentient sphere

that had been an asteroid.

"You were right, Crag," spoke the voice in his mind.

Crag wondered what he'd been right about.

"About the corruptness of the race to which you belong. It is even worse than you thought of it as being. I have been inside many minds. They are weak minds, almost without exception morally weak."

Crag grinned. He thought, "I'm no lily myself."

"You are not, but you are strong. You are a criminal because you are a rebel against a society that has no place for strong men. In a society that is good, the weak are criminals; in a society that is bad, there is no place for a strong man except as a criminal. You are better than they, Crag. You have killed men, but you have killed them fairly. Your society kills them corruptly, by inches. Worse, those who are being killed acquiesce, not only because they are weak, but because they, too, hope to get on the exploiting side."

"You make the human race sound pretty bad."

"It is bad. This is a period of decadence. It has been better and it will be better again. I have studied your history and find that there were similar periods before and humanity has struggled out of them. It will again, Crag."

Crag yawned. He said, "You turned carbon dioxide to oxygen in my space-suit. You wouldn't, by any chance, care to turn the water in that cooler into something stronger, would you? I could use a drink."

He felt in his mind a sense of amusement that was not his own, as though the entity that spoke there was laughing. The thought in his mind said, "Buy yourself your own drinks, Crag. You can afford them, and you can wait till you get to Marsport. I

have something more important to do than to be a bartender for you."

"Such as?" Crag asked.

"To create a world."

Crag sat up straight and quit feeling sleepy. He said, "What?" aloud.

"Or possibly re-create one. There seems to be a difference of opinion among your astronomers as to whether the asteroids once formed a planet which broke up into many small pieces—of which I was one—or whether the gasses which, in the case of other planets, solidified into spheres, in the case of the asteroids formed a ring of gasses instead and solidified into many small bodies, planetoids.

"In either case, the matter for another planet is there, revolving around the sun in orbits between the orbit of Mars and the orbit of Jupiter. It is merely necessary to gather and coalesce them and there will be a new planet—or a scattered one will be re-created."

Crag started to ask why and then, instead, began to wonder why not. Neither question was answered.

Instead, the voice in his mind went on, quite calmly. "It is merely necessary for me to gather the other asteroids about myself as a nucleus. When all have been gathered, the planet will be larger than Mars, perhaps almost as large as Earth.

"It will be a new planet, a raw planet. It will need tough colonists, Crag. I want you to gather a few—criminals like yourself, who do not acquiesce in the social system of the rest of your race. Ones who are tough, not soft and weak like the others. Colonize and people me, Crag, with strong men like yourself."

Crag stared at the sphere. He asked softly, "Is that an order?"

"Of course not. It is a request. I

can see into your mind enough to realize that you would die rather than obey an order—even if it was an order to do something you *wanted* to do. And that is why I want you, and men like you, to colonize the planet I shall create. Men who will not take orders." There was a pause and then the voice in Crag's mind said, "*I do not want to be a god*, Crag. I would not be colonized by anyone who *would* obey me. And yet I want people to live upon me."

Crag said, "You won't lack for people. If a new planet forms in the solar system—"

"No one will colonize me if I do not wish them to live there. I shall have a poisonous atmosphere, Crag. Poisonous to anyone I do not want. Crag, can you find other men who are, mentally and physically, as hard and as strong as you?"

"Perhaps, but—"

"I see your hesitation. On Earth or Mars, you will be rich, with the two hundred thousand credits you have. They would be worthless on a new planet. You are right, but I think and hope you will soon tire of whatever that money will bring you. You are too strong to like a soft life. I think you will come to me. And when you do, bring others if you can—but they must be strong, too."

Crag said slowly, "I'll see. I'll think it over."

"Good. That is all I ask. Goodbye, Crag."

"Goodbye," Crag thought. Belatedly he remembered that the sphere had saved his life ten hours before when he had been dying in the void. The sphere was no longer there, but he thought "—and thanks," anyway, hoping that, even at the incredible speed at which it could travel, it would still catch the thought.

He stood up and stretched to get the stiffness of his long sleep out of

his muscles. Then he picked the lock on the controls and set course for Mars. Not for Marsport, of course, or any other city. The spaceship was registered in Olliver's name, and if he landed it in any spaceport, he'd have to explain what had happened to Olliver, and that wouldn't be easy. And even if he himself got through the hands of the spaceport guards and the police, the two hundred thousand credits definitely would not.

He put the ship down in the Martian desert, carefully choosing a spot where red sand dunes screened it from sight and it could be seen only from above. A patrol craft would probably spot it sooner or later, but it *might* still be there if he ever wanted or needed it. Long experience had taught him that it was good to have a possible ace in the hole, even with a fortune in his pocket.

IT WAS early morning when he landed and he left the ship at once so he could reach civilization before the extreme heat of midday. Aside from the money, he carried nothing with him except a compass and a small paragon in case he should encounter any of the monster lizards of the Martian desert.

He met none, however, and reached the settlement of New Boston before the sun was halfway to the zenith. He chartered a plane there and was in Marsport before noon.

He spent a hundred credits for a fine wardrobe and luggage to contain it, then took an aircab to the Luxor, finest and most expensive hotel in a city whose major industry was catering to wealthy visitors from Earth.

The desk clerk stared disdainfully at Crag through pince-nez glasses. His gaze went to the four porters who were carrying Crag's new and expensive luggage. But so little of it!

His voice was cold and distant.

"You have a reservation, of course, Mr.—ah."

"That's right," Crag said. "Mr. Ah. George Ah, to be exact. And I have no reservation, but I want the finest suite you have available."

"I am afraid, Mr.—ah—Ah, that there is nothing available."

Crag grinned. "If you'll take in my card to the manager, I'm sure he'll be able to arrange something."

He put down a ten-credit bill—at least a week's pay for the desk clerk, even of as swanky a hotel as the Luxor—on the desk.

The clerk's eyes warmed somewhat behind the pince-nez; they became no colder than hailstones and somewhat more protuberant. He said, "Pardon me, sir. I'll check the register." He didn't touch the ten-credit bill, but he pulled a crocodile-bound ledger from under the desk and covered the bill with it while he thumbed through pages. After a moment, he said, "The Gubernatorial Suite is open, sir. Twenty credits a day."

"I'll take it," Crag said. He signed "George Ah" on the register.

In the twenty-by-twenty living room of the suite, he tipped the four porters generously and then, as they left, looked about him. Doors indicated that he must have several other rooms at his disposal, but he walked out first onto the balcony and stood looking over the fabulous city of Marsport that lay below him in the bright, hot afternoon sun.

He felt strange here; he wondered for the first time what he, Crag, was doing here. It was the first time in his life that he had ever registered in a luxury hotel. It was plenty expensive—twenty credits a day was a month's wages on an average skilled job—but he had plenty of money and he should be safer here than in any inexpensive lodging. In Marsport, the more money you spent the less like-

ly you were to be asked questions. If you spent money like water they figured you were a capitalist, a politician or a labor leader.

AFTER A few minutes he went back inside, closing the balcony door on the afternoon heat, and wondered what he should do. He was going to get drunk, of course, but why rush it? Plenty of time for that. The rest of his life, in fact.

He tried opening doors. The first led to a well-stocked liquor cabinet. He poured himself one drink of Martian woji, hoping it would make him feel a bit more cheerful, but it didn't. He tried the next door and it led to a library that was well stocked with books, records and tapes. He wandered about it briefly, noting that most of the books were pornographic; that meant that the tapes were probably pornographic also.

A double door in front of a pneumatic divan turned out to open on a television screen eight feet wide and six feet high. Crag turned on the switch and sat down on the divan. It was a musical show originating in New York on Earth. Before a three-dimensional chorus undulating in full color a pale tenor was singing:

*Jet up! Jet down! On a slow ship  
to Pluto!*

*Honey-wunny-bunny, how'd you  
like my....*

Crag got up and turned off the switch. He went back and had himself another drink at the liquor cabinet. It didn't taste particularly good to him.

He tried another door. It led to a smaller sitting room, well supplied with gambling equipment of all kinds, the walls lined with solitaire gambling machines. Crag knew that all the machines would be rigged with high percentages against him and didn't bother trying them. Besides, what's the



fun in gambling when you've already got more money than you know what to do with?

Another door led to the master bedroom. It was even larger than the living room and more ornately furnished. The ebony bed was at least eight feet wide and was ornately furnished, indeed; a blonde, a brunette and a redhead, all naked, lay upon it. For just a second, Crag thought that the redhead looked like Evadne. But she didn't.

She was the one, though, that caught his eye. She sat up and raised her arms above her head, stretching like a kitten as she smiled at him. "Hello," she said.

Crag leaned against the jamb of the door. He asked, "Are you standard equipment? Pardon my ignorance, but I've never had a gubernatorial suite before."

The redhead laughed. "Of course. But you needn't keep *all* of us. Unless you wish." She looked demurely at her gilded toenails. The blonde smiled at him and then rolled over on her back, apparently figuring that she showed off to better advantages that way. She did. The brunette gave him a gamin grin. "We're more fun three at a time," she said. "We know tricks."

Crag said, "Get out. All of you."

They didn't argue; they didn't even seem offended or even annoyed. They got up calmly and went past him through the doorway of the bedroom and on out through the outer door into the hallway, still stark naked but apparently completely unaware of the fact.

Crag went over and made sure that the door was locked behind them. Then he went to the liquor closet and poured himself another drink. He noticed, for the first time, the pornographic murals above the bar of the liquor closet. He took the bottle of

woji with him, and the glass. He slammed the door of the closet.

He drank that drink slowly, thinking and trying not to think.

There was a soft knock on the door. Crag put down his glass and went to answer it. A bellboy stood there just outside the door, smiling at him. A very beautiful young man, rosy and handsome, with soft ringlets of curly hair.

He said, "The management sent me, sir. Since you did not want— Is there anything I can do for you?"

Crag grinned and pretended to look him over carefully. He said, "Turn around."

The young man smiled knowingly and turned gracefully around. He had a pleasingly plump posterior; he wriggled it a trifle, provocatively.

Crag drew back his foot and kicked hard.

He closed the door gently.

### CHAPTER III

HE WANDERED about the suite, wondering idly if there wasn't a cabinet of narcotics anywhere; it was equipped for everything else. But the management would probably send up any kind of dope you wanted if you phoned for it.

He found the dials of a newsradio in the wall and turned it on. Just before the end of a broadcast. "... in the asteroid belt," said the radio. "Scientists of both Mars and Earth are working on the problem, but have failed thus far to advance an acceptable theory to account for the unprecedented and incredible phenomenon. This concludes the newscast that started at three o'clock; the next newscast will be presented at four, Marsport time."

Crag glanced at his wristchrono and saw that there would be three-quar-

ters of an hour to wait. He went to the phone and asked for the manager. An obsequious voice told him to wait a moment and a moment later a smooth voice said, "Carleton, manager, speaking."

"George Ah, suite two hundred," Crag said. "I just tuned in on the tail end of a newscast—Marsport news station—concerning something happening in the asteroid belt. Could you arrange with the station to have that part of the newscast played back for me immediately from the recording that was made of it at the time?"

"I fear, Mr. Ah, that would involve rewiring of the newscast set in your room. It is automatically tuned to the main carrier wave of—"

"Over the phone," Crag said. "Just put a call through to the station and have them play back that part of the newscast over the phone for me."

"I'll see if that can be arranged, Mr. Ah. If you'll please cradle your phone, I'll call you back as soon as..."

Crag cradled the phone and sat down beside it until the buzzer buzzed. He picked it up again.

"It can be arranged," said the manager's voice. "There will be a charge of ten credits. Is that satisfactory?"

"Arrange it," Crag said. "Hurry."

As he put the phone down again and watched it, he wondered what the hurry was. What went on out in the asteroid belt didn't concern him. *He* wasn't going to be sap enough to give up the soft life he could have here for anything as ridiculous as starting a colony of criminals on a new and raw planet.

But just the same he watched the phone, his impatience mounting until it buzzed again.

"The station is ready, sir. The management of the Luxor is glad to have been able to arrange..."

"Get off the wire, then," Crag said.

THERE WAS a short wait and then came the voice of the announcer of the newscast: "According to many reliable reports, a strange and incredible phenomenon is taking place in the asteroid belt. First report came in eight hours ago from Marsport astronomers who were observing the asteroid Ceres—largest of the asteroids, with a diameter of four hundred and eighty miles—when it vanished from the telescope, which had been set to follow its course automatically. When found again, it had changed speed greatly and direction slightly. The directional change was quickly analyzed by the computing machine and it was found that Ceres had now lost the eccentric and parabolic aspects of its orbit; it was following a perfectly circular orbit about the sun, perfectly in the plane of the ecliptic.

"When Ceres was found to be steady in its new orbit, observation was made of other of the asteroids—those large enough to be observable. Hidalgo, whose eccentricity is point six five, was found with difficulty, considerably out of its former orbit; its new orbit, upon analysis, also proved to be a perfect circle in the plane of the ecliptic, an orbit coinciding with that of Ceres—and Hidalgo is traveling at a far greater speed. Hidalgo will overtake and crash into Ceres within hours.

"The most amazing thing is that the speed of the asteroid Hidalgo in its new orbit and in relation to its mass is impossible according to the laws of angular momentum. Marsport Observatory immediately communicated with the other observatories of Mars and of Earth and for six hours now all telescopes in the system have been trained on the asteroids.

"No single asteroid large enough to be observable in a telescope is in its former orbit! All are now in, or moving toward, the same identical or-

bit—a perfect circle which lies exactly halfway between the mean distance of Mars and the mean distance of Jupiter from the sun. And as they are moving at different speeds, they will all crash together *and form a new planet.*

"If it can be assumed that the smaller asteroids—those which cannot be seen telescopically—are joining in this movement then the new planet being formed will be slightly larger than Mars.

"Spaceships are now converging upon the asteroid belt to watch the incredible development at close hand. An event of cosmic importance is taking place in the asteroid belt. Scientists of both Earth and Mars are working on the problem, but have failed thus far to advance an acceptable theory to account for..."

Crag put the phone back in its cradle; that was where he'd tuned in on the newscast a few minutes before.

He thought, *So the little devil is really doing it.* He grinned and poured himself a drink from the woji bottle.

The grin faded slowly as he drank.

The shadows lengthened and vanished and it grew dark, and after a while he went out on the balcony and stood staring up at the moon Phobos, hurtling across the Martian sky and after a while longer Demos, too, rose.

He wondered why he couldn't get drunk and why, with so much money, he wasn't happy.

He stared upward and located the plane of the ecliptic—the plane in which the planets revolve and which, to an observer on any planet is an imaginary line. He followed it through the familiar constellations, brighter through the thinner air of Mars than they are from Earth, until he found an unfamiliar dot in the constellation Virgo. He watched it for half an hour until he was sure that it was moving in relation to the stars around it. No

other planet was then in Virgo; it must be the new one.

But he wasn't going there. Nothing would be crazier than to give up his sudden wealth for the rough life of a new planet.

HE WENT back inside the suite and turned on the radio. The announcer was talking about the elections on Earth, pretending that there was a doubt of their outcome; that they hadn't been decided and bargained for in advance between the two parties that were really one.

Crag listened without hearing until the announcer's voice changed to real interest. "Now for the latest reports on the new planet which is forming with incredible rapidity. Observations are being made from spaceships only a few thousand miles away. The new planet is now approximately the size of Mercury.

"It is revolving apparently at random so that each new asteroid to strike it and become part of it hits a different spot and a sphere is being formed. The asteroids, large and small, which are not already a part of it are moving toward it—some with retrograde motion—at many times their former speeds. It is estimated that the last of them will reach the new planet, completing it, within twelve hours or even less. As soon thereafter as the surface has stabilized, landings will be made.

"No decision has been made yet on a name for the new planet. Majority opinion favors giving the honor of naming it to Dr. Henry Wilkins of Marsport Observatory. It was Dr. Wilkins who first observed the perturbation of the orbit of the asteroid Ceres. His report focused attention upon the asteroid belt and led to the discovery that the new planet was being formed."

The newscaster went back to Ter-

restrial politics and Crag shut off the radio. He thumbed his nose at it and went to the liquor closet for another bottle of woji.

He got drunk. And, as is the way with woji, he sat there, dull physically, but with his mind seeming more clear and brilliant than it had ever seemed before. He remembered everything that had ever happened to him and none of it seemed quite as bad as it had at the time. Not even the time he'd been tortured on Venus; thinking back about it, he had to laugh at the ridiculous seriousness with which the semi-savage Venusians took themselves and everything else. Why be serious? Everything was funny, even the new planet that wanted him, Crag, to colonize it. And bring other criminals, the toughest ones he could find, with him.

Male and female ones both?—or hadn't that ridiculous little sphere which was gathering a new world about it thought of that? He roared with laughter at how stupid the sphere had been not to have thought of that. How long could an all-male colony last?

Still—he had a serious thought—with a planet completely new and raw, perhaps that would be best at the very start, until they had the planet licked. Once they had living quarters and living arrangements and knew what was deadly and what wasn't; that would be the time for a return trip somewhere to pick up women for themselves. Or the others could, anyway.

He, Crag, hated all women—except Evadne, and Evadne was dead. All other women were soft and corrupt, like the one he'd been engaged to so many years ago and who'd deserted him when he'd lost his hand and his spaceman's job. Well, she'd have had some tough times if she'd stuck with him; there wasn't any denying that.

But he wondered if she was still alive and what she'd think if she knew where he was now and that he had a fortune in his pocket. Probably come running to see if she could get him back. Women were like that. *Women.*

He laughed harder. And drank more, and his mind became even clearer although some of the laughter went away.

He thought of Evadne, of her lush body and her copper hair and her clear blue eyes that were straight and honest in a world that was as crooked as a poker game in a Martian gambling joint and as ugly as Evadne was beautiful.

And he drank more and he didn't laugh at all; he seemed to see Evadne standing there before him in the dimly lighted room, and he rose to go to her, but when he reached her she wasn't there.

**H**E DRANK more and became angry and amused himself for a while walking about the suite smashing things that were smashable and some things that—by an ordinary man—wouldn't have been smashable at all. But Crag's missing hand had been replaced by a heavily weighted metal one—although he managed to carry it so lightly that no one suspected what a deadly weapon it was—and he could deal a blow with it that was as quick as the dart of a tsetse fly and had the authority of a sledgehammer. It wasn't a hand you'd want to be slapped with.

He smashed furniture and gambling equipment and the huge television screen and the equipment behind it. The hotel wouldn't mind; they'd simply put it on his bill—as the women and the bellboy and the liquor and even every minute he used the radio would be on his bill. The twenty credits—two hundred dollars—a day that one paid for a suite like this was mere-

ly the starting point of all they billed you for.

But after a while he tired of smashing things and drank some more and then lay down on the divan and slept—not using or wanting to use the great seven by eight foot bed in the bedroom.

It was almost noon when he awakened. He felt terrible until he'd groped his way to the liquor cabinet and taken a shot of antihang and then a quick pick-up shot of the fiery Martian liquor.

After that he was able to look about at the shambles he'd made of the place, and to laugh. It looked better that way, he thought.

Just the same, he stopped at the desk on his way out. A tall man in archaic full dress was behind it. Crag said, "The manager, please."

"I am the manager, Mr. Carleton. You are Mr.—ah—Ah?"

"Yes. There was a hurricane in my room last night. You will please have it refurnished immediately. Except, perhaps, for the television set. I think I will be happier without a television set. The refurnishing at my expense, of course."

"Of course, sir. We shall have it done at once. There will, also, be put on your bill a charge for temporary incapacitation of the—ah—bellboy."

"Well worth it," Crag said. He went into the restaurant of the hotel and ordered and ate a meal. It was a wonderful meal made up of the choicest viands of three planets and it cost him more than he had earned in a week back in the days when he'd been a spaceman. He wondered why he didn't enjoy it especially. Even the rare vintage wines served with it didn't taste right although he knew that they were the best money could buy.

He wandered into the main gambling saloon and managed to divest

himself of forty credits in the *mara* game, but the dealing was so obviously crooked that he played along merely for the privilege of watching so crude an exhibition. Even with only one good hand, he could have done better himself.

Finally, in utter disgust, he slapped his metal left hand down—not too hard—on the hand of the dealer who was passing a card to him. The dealer screamed and dropped two cards, where only one should have been. Then he stepped back, moaning, to nurse his broken hand. Crag left his bet and walked out.

Probably, he thought with grim amusement, he'd be billed for that, too.

He went back up to his suite and found it refurnished and in perfect shape. Even the monster television screen had been replaced; probably they'd billed him for twice its value and hoped he'd break it again.

Again, and more strongly, the sheer magnificence and expensiveness of the suite struck him and he laughed and then wondered, *what am I doing here?*

He poured himself a drink and then wandered over to the wall-radio and turned it on. Politics again. He went to the pneumatic divan and sat down with the bottle in one hand and a glass in the other and managed not to listen to that part of the newscast. But then he found himself leaning slightly forward to listen as, again, the newscaster's voice changed from simulated to genuine interest.

"The new planet between Mars and Jupiter is now complete, a sphere larger than Mars, almost identical with Earth in size. Slightly larger, in fact. Apparently estimates of the total volume of mass of the asteroids erred on the short side, due to the great number of asteroids too small to have been charted.



"Strangely, considering the suddenness of its formation, the surface seems to be quite stable, free from quakes and convulsions. Landing parties will be organized very soon from among the patrol ships which have been observing the planet's formation. Pardon me a second—

"I have just been handed a bulletin informing me that the new planet has been named. Dr. Wilkins of Marsport Observatory has, with the concurrence of his colleagues chosen the name Cragon—C-r-a-g-o-n, Cragon."

Crag put back his head and laughed.

#### CHAPTER IV

HE THOUGHT, *the little devil, names himself after me.* For Crag knew it couldn't be a coincidence that Cragon had been chosen as a name; even though a man he'd never heard of and who had never heard of him had done the choosing. Cragon had named itself; it must have planted that thought in the minds of the astronomers at Marsport Observatory when it had been here on Mars studying conditions and deciding what it was to do.

The announcer was going on. "The name has no special mythological derivation, Dr. Wilkins explains. It was chosen arbitrarily as a euphonious combination of syllables. All other planets, as you know, were named after prominent characters in ancient mythology, but the practice was abandoned after the discovery of so many asteroids that all such names had been used.

"In a few hours we shall be able to give you reports from the first landing parties."

And back to politics and the elections.

Crag shut off the newsradio. He got himself another drink and sat down with it, still chuckling. *Thinks*

*he's going to get me that way, he thought.*

He had a few more drinks and then looked around the suite and decided that he hated it worse than any place he'd ever been in. He wanted to smash things again, but he knew that would be purposeless and that he wouldn't get any real pleasure out of doing it a second time.

But he had to get away from it for a while. He remembered, though, how much money he had and decided it wouldn't be safe to carry all of it. No one would take it away from him while he was conscious, but if he ended up—as he probably would—in a spaceman's dive, he didn't want to have to watch how much he drank.

He thought of putting it in a bank, but that would be even more dangerous; you could trust banks with small amounts, but with a sum like that they'd finagle him out of it some way. Besides, such a deposit in cash might interest government investigators if they heard about it, and they'd investigate him and want to know where he got it. And they'd try to take it away from him if the bank didn't. The vault of the hotel would be even more risky.

He took the money out of his pocket and studied what to do with it. There were still nineteen ten-thousand-credit bills; he'd broken only one of them. He decided that hiding the nineteen bills in various places about the suite would be safest.

He did a good job of hiding them, and when he left he did a bit of work on the lock of the door with some tiny tools he carried; no one could open it but himself when he'd finished with it.

When he got to Spaceman's Row, he thought at first he was on the wrong street. It had changed tremendously, but he remembered now that the change had already started the

last time he'd been there, four years before. Some of the dives had been cleaned up and prettied up then; now, they all were. The picturesqueness was gone and if there was any dirt you couldn't see it for neon.

He walked the length of it, looking for a familiar place and failing to find one, before he chose the least garish of the bars and went in.

A FEW spacemen, with girls, were at the bar drinking and watching a television screen. The spacemen looked young, callow and almost effeminate compared to the men who used to fly the spaceways.

Crag paid no attention to them after a first glance, taking a stool at the bar and facing away from the television screen.

The bartender, although he was dressed in a fancy monkey suit, looked almost human, although his eyes were a little too shifty for Crag's taste.

He grinned when Crag ordered a woji. "Guess you haven't been around Marsport recently. Illegal now."

"Had some this morning," Crag said.

"Must've been at a fancy hotel. The law doesn't bother them, but it's sure clamped down on Spaceman's Row. It ain't what it used to be."

"So I notice."

"Nothing stronger than kodore. No fights now, no nothing. Plenty of women, though. Dope, if you want it, except the kinds that might make you feel scrappy. Nope, it ain't what it used to be."

Crag took the well stuffed wallet from his pocket. He put a five-credit bill on the bar, a dozen times the price of a glass of woji. He looked at the bartender inquiringly.

The bartender looked at the bill and then slid it off the bar and into his pocket. "Just a minute," he said.

Crag nodded and the bartender went through a door at the back and, a moment later, came back through it and nodded at Crag, beckoning.

Crag followed him through the door and closed it behind him. There was a bottle of woji on the table, and a glass. Crag reached for the bottle and the bartender stuck a heat-gun in his side. "Up," he said.

Crag raised his hands—apparently quite casually, but as they reached shoulder level the left hand—the metal one—flicked just slightly against the bartender's chin. The bartender and the heat-gun fell, separately. Crag pocketed the heat-gun.

He sat down at the table and poured himself a drink. After a few minutes the bartender blinked his eyes and then sat up, touching his chin gingerly and wincing. He looked at Crag curiously and Crag grinned at him. "Have a drink," he said. "Get yourself a glass."

The bartender got up slowly and then got himself a glass and another chair. Crag poured him a drink.

The bartender sipped it, staring at Crag. He said slowly, "You hit me with your left hand, lightly. So it's a metal one and weighted. I've heard stories about a guy named Crag. They're almost legends. And he was in Marsport four years ago and so were you. My name's Gardin and I'm sorry I tried to take you."

"That's all right," Crag said. They shook hands.

Gardin said, "Listen, Crag, don't flash that much dough. Not because of criminals; there aren't many of them—of us—left. On account of the law. The bulls pick up anybody they don't know who flashes money and the judges fine him every cent he's got on him and split with the bulls. It's not like the old days when a man had a chance."

Gardin stared straight ahead for a

moment. "I wanted to get out of this place; that's why I tried to take you. Only, Crag, where is there to go that's any better?"

"Nowhere," Crag told him. "Have another drink."

"I better get back to the bar. Come on, I'll bring the woji with us, only I'll pour it in a kodore bottle. Same color and nobody'll know the difference."

They went back to the bar and Crag poured them each a drink while Gardin poured refills for the spacemen and their women. He came back to Crag.

He said quietly, "Careful if any coppers come in: Down that stuff quick and I'll cap the bottle. You can smell woji yards away and them coppers have noses."

Crag glanced at the spacemen and Gardin said contemptuously, "Don't worry about them; they never even smelled woji. Just out of school and don't know which way is up."

**C**RAG NODDED and turned to glance at the big television screen which the other group was watching. On the screen an almost naked woman was singing a more than suggestive song of the delights of perversion. The spacemen and their women watched with rapt attention, but when the song ended, they finished their drinks and left.

Crag said, "Shut the thing off."

Gardin started for the switch, but before he reached it, the scene changed; on the screen was a planet floating in space, seen from a distance of about ten thousand miles. It wasn't a planet Crag had ever seen before. The telecaster's voice said, "We bring you a special broadcast of the first landing on the new planet Cragon, suddenly and miraculously formed of the scattered matter of the asteroid belt between—"

Gardin was reaching for the switch, but Crag said sharply, "Don't. Leave it on."

He was studying the new planet with amazement. There were seas on it and he thought he could make out rivers and different colored patches that could only be vegetation—probably huge forests. *Water*, he thought with sudden curiosity; *where could it have got water?* And then he remembered that the entity which had been an asteroid had transmuted carbon dioxide in his helmet into oxygen. So why couldn't it transmute any element into any other one? Even so, how could it have created vegetation upon itself so quickly?

"The view upon the screen," said the voice of the telecaster, "is from a port of the mother ship. We shall maintain this distance above the surface while a two-man scouter we have sent out makes the first actual landing. It is on its way now and should reach the upper atmosphere within less than a minute. When it does we shall switch you to the voice of Captain Burke who has command of the scouter; Lieutenant Laidlaw is with him. The scouter is too small to hold a telecaster, so the view upon the screen will continue to be from the mother ship. However, if the scouter makes a successful landing and gives us the come-on signal, this ship shall follow it to the surface and you will have a close view of whatever lies on Cragon.

"The landing will be made regardless of the nature of the atmosphere, which has thus far defied complete spectroscopic analysis from a distance. Oxygen is present in about the same proportion as in the atmosphere of Earth, but there are other gasses present, one of which has new and unknown Fraunhofer lines, undoubtedly the lines of a hitherto undiscovered element.

"If you have missed recent news-casts and telecasts, I might tell you that it has been determined that the density of Cragon is about that of Earth, as is its gravity. The proportion of land to water is much greater, about half—as against Earth's one-fifth. The land surface, therefore, is almost two and a half times that of Earth, truly a magnificent place for colonization—if the air is breathable.

"I have a signal from Captain Burke. He is ready to cut in. Go ahead, Captain."

A DIFFERENT voice spoke. "Captain Burke talking from the scouter ship. We are entering the upper atmosphere. We are above the largest continent of Cragon. We are fifty miles high and our instruments show a slight increase of atmospheric pressure, although still not much over a laboratory vacuum—about the same reading for an equivalent height above Earth. We are descending at the rate of five miles a minute, although we shall have to slow our descent soon.

"We can see from here—I think with certainty—that the dark areas of the land surface really are forests, incredible as that is. At least they look the same as Earth's forest areas look from an equivalent height—forty-five miles now."

Crag grinned at Gardin. "They'll never make it. Bet you."

"Huh? Why not?"

"Atmosphere poisonous."

"So what?" They're in a spaceship. That won't stop them from landing. And they won't get out without suits until they've checked the air."

"Bet they don't land. A thousand credits to the five I just gave you for the woji."

Gardin laughed. "You're crazy, Crag, but that's sure a bet."

They turned back to the screen.

"Thirty miles now, almost into the

stratosphere. Something seems to be wrong with the air conditioner in this scouter. It's getting hard to breathe. Lieutenant Laidlaw is working with it. Getting it fixed, Lieutenant?"

"He says he can't find anything wrong with it, and our oxygen indicator shows normal quantity. Can't understand it. We're twenty-two miles now. But both of us breathing hard. I—can't figure what's—"

Crag looked at Gardin. "Double the bet?"

Gardin shook his head.

The voice was labored. "We're going—back up. Something's wrong and it's not—our air conditioner. Going—fast as we can—take it. Thirty miles again. Not—quite so bad. Almost breathe.

"Checking with Laidlaw. Says—our air normal, but an added ingredient. The unknown element. Came right through the hull—osmosis or something. Thirty-five miles.

"We're all right now. But returning to the mother ship for a conference."

Crag grinned at Gardin and then walked over and shut off the television set. Gardin took the five credit note out of his pocket and put it on the bar. But he said, "I don't get it. How'd you know before it happened?"

"Inside information. That's one planet they'll *never* land on. Not alive, anyway. If they ever lick that trick, my pal's got other ones up his sleeve."

"Your pal?"

"Cragon. Named himself after me."

Crag took another sip of his drink.

"The little—"

"Who?"

"Cragon. I just told you. Listen, Gardin, how'd you like to—no, skip it." Crag turned morosely back to his drink.

The door behind Crag opened sud-

denly. Crag turned and saw three uniformed policemen—tough-looking mugs all, with heat-guns in spring holsters ready for action—coming in the door. Crag turned back to the bar casually and downed the last of his drink, and Gardin, equally casually, picked up the bottle and was replacing the cap, turning toward the back bar as he did so.

But the closest copper was sniffing audibly. "Hey, you," he told Gardin, "let's see that bottle."

Crag turned his head and saw that all three of them had heat-guns in their hands, one of them aiming at him and two of them at Gardin. It was going to be a stick-up, a legal stick-up—and to make it legal probably both Gardin and he would get five-year sentences on the technicality of selling and buying, respectively, a forbidden beverage.

## CHAPTER V

Crag glanced back over the bar and, before Gardin turned, he caught Gardin's eyes in the mirror. Just for a fleeting instant, but enough. The eyes said, "We'll make a break if we can."

Crag turned back on the stool, very casually, raising his hands at the menace of the heat-gun pointing at him and only two feet from him. A quick flick of his eyes downward showed him that it was going to be almost too easy; the safety stud of the heater was still in safe position and it would take the copper almost a second to fire. Obviously he wasn't anticipating trouble, with three armed men against two unarmed ones. The copper guarding Crag was at the bar beside him, the other two were also at the bar, and beyond. Gardin was turning around with the bottle.

It was almost too easy. Crag practically fell forward off the stool, his

right hand, from a raised position, pistoning out for the jaw of the copper and his metal left hand chopping down at the heater. And he kept on going forward, pushing the first copper back against the others. Number one's heater hit the floor as he went back, unconscious from the blow to his chin. Number two went down, too, and Crag, keeping going right across Number one, put his left hand in Number two's stomach, just above the belt buckle.

Number three, knocked off balance against the bar, had time to trigger his heater wildly and the backbar mirror shattered under sudden heat as Gardin, who'd taken a reversed grip on the bottle, leaned across the bar and broke it over Number three's head.

Crag gathered the three heaters and looked quickly toward the window. No one was passing by. Gardin quickly came around the bar and helped Crag drag them into the back room. None of them was dead. Gardin got a stack of bar towels and started tearing them into strips; within minutes all three of the coppers were bound and gagged so efficiently that they wouldn't get loose, by their own efforts, for hours.

Gardin mopped sweat off his forehead and looked at Crag. Crag grinned. "You ruined that bottle of woji," he said. "Got another?"

Gardin got another and they went back to the bar. While Gardin filled their glasses, Crag fiddled with the dials of the television set. A blonde tenor with marcelled hair was singing:

*"Jet up! Jet down! On a slow ship to Pluto!"*

Crag switched it off and went back to the bar.

Gardin said worriedly, "We had to do it; if we hadn't, it'd've been five or ten years for each of us. But now



it's life if they get us. What do we do, Crag?"

Crag suddenly knew, and he knew now that he'd known all along, that it had been only a matter of time until he'd decided.

"We go to Cragon," he said.

"But—the poisonous atmosphere!"

"I've got an in. It won't be poisonous for me, or for anyone I take with me. Do you know any others that would like to go? I've got a ship that will carry half a dozen for that short a trip."

"You serious, Crag?"

Crag nodded.

"I've got a pal that'll go. And his woman and mine."

"How long have we got?"

GARDIN looked up at the clock in the wall. "Seven hours. I'd just started my shift. If I lock the door when we go, nobody'll bother the place till the next bartender comes here; everybody'll just think the place is closed."

"Want to call your friends from here?"

Gardin mopped his forehead again. "Sooner I get out of here—with those cops tied up back there—the better I'll feel. Let's go."

They left the place and Gardin closed the blinds and locked it.

"My woman lives just around the corner," Gardin said, "and Pete Hauser and his woman live only a block away. Shall we get them first?"

Crag said, "I'm going to buy an aircar. We'll need one to get to the spaceship and it'll be easier to buy one than to take a chance of being checked on if we hire one."

"You got enough money you'd buy an aircar just for one trip and leave it?"

Crag laughed. "Sure. And what good's money where we're going? I've got a hundred and ninety thousand

credits back at the hotel and no use for it at all. But we'll go back and get it anyway, just in case."

Gardin whistled. "Pal, with *that* much money, we can buy our way out of this rap. We wouldn't have to lam."

"Don't you want to go?"

"Sure, sure. Look, this is the house. Can you pick us up here in an hour?"

Crag caught an aircab and went to the biggest aircar agency in Marsport. He was whistling now and felt happier than he'd felt in years. He wondered why he'd taken so long to make up his mind.

It took him less than an hour to complete the purchase of a five-place aircar and get it serviced and fueled for a five-hundred mile trip. It was just turning dusk when he returned to the doorway where he'd left Gardin.

Four people were waiting for him there. Gardin's woman, a big blonde named Stell. Pete Hauser, a little man—but tough-looking—with a rodent face and beady eyes. Gert, small and dark, Gypsy-looking, quick and graceful in her movements. And Gardin, who had switched from his monkey-suit into spaceman's gear. He'd guessed right, then, about Gardin's having been a spaceman once—in the days when the spaceways weren't a tea party.

Crag drove them to the Luxor and suggested a stirrup cup in his suite.

The lock of his door hadn't been disturbed. He let them in and enjoyed—but not too much—watching the eyes of the two women as they took in the luxury of the gubernatorial suite. He opened the liquor closet and told them to help themselves and pour one for him while he gathered the money and decided what part of his luggage he'd take along.

The first ten thousand credit bill

wasn't where he'd hidden it. Nor the second. Nor any of them.

C RAG SAT down, frowning, to drink the woji Stell brought him, and to think. It couldn't have been an outside job. The suite was accessible only through the door he'd fixed so no one but himself could open the lock. There must be a secret entrance somewhere and the hotel itself must have done the job. Besides, it would have taken a more detailed search to have found *all* of those bills than any casual thief could have made or would have dared to make.

After buying the aircar he still had several thousand credits and money would be useless on Cragon, anyway, but—

He told the others what had happened and sent each to a different room of the suite to look for a secret entrance. Pete Hauser found it, cleverly concealed in the shelving of the pornographic library.

Grag turned down Gardin's offer of help and told them all to wait. The secret entrance was locked from the outside, but that gave him only a minute's pause. Then he was in a narrow passageway and going down several narrow flights of padded steps. He passed other secret doors of other suites, all locked from his side, and he could have burgled as many suites as he wished—but there wasn't any reason to. He'd never stolen for the fun of it, and he didn't need money now, whether he got his own back or not.

There were peepholes into all the suites, too, an intricate system of them. More than peepholes, really; they were fair sized portions of the walls that were transparent from one side and not from the other. He realized now that he must have been watched while he was hiding the bills; otherwise, in the few hours he'd

been out, no search would have found every last one of them.

He decided that he didn't like the Luxor Hotel nor its management. Glancing casually through the transparent areas into some of the suites he passed, he decided he didn't like the clientele of the place, either. In fact, he didn't like Marsport; he didn't like civilization in general—as civilization was just then.

And he particularly decided that he didn't like the manager of the Luxor, who undoubtedly had sole access to this system of secret corridors, peepholes and entrances.

When he'd counted enough flights to know that he was on the main floor he started looking for—and found—a panel that locked from the other side. That would be either the manager's office or his private quarters. There wasn't any peephole for him to scout through, so he picked the lock more quietly than he had ever picked one before.

He inched the panel open silently. It opened into the manager's office. He could see the manager's back, as the panel opened behind the desk. Mr. Carleton still wore the archaic full dress suit, almost the only one Crag had ever seen.

Crag stepped out of the panel, more quietly than any cat. He reached his right hand around the scrawny neck of the manager and pulled back, squeezing just hard enough to prevent any outcry and pulling back just far enough to keep Carleton's groping hands from reaching any of the buttons on or under his desk.

"Where is the money?" he asked quietly.

He relaxed pressure enough to permit a whisper, and when none came, he tightened his fingers again. A thin hand came up and pointed to a metal door with a combination knob set in the wall directly across the

room from where he stood.

"Come on," Crag said. "You're going with me while I open it, and if any help comes—whether you manage to call for it or not—you die when it gets here."

He pulled the man up out of the chair and walked him across the room until they stood facing the safe, Carleton between Crag and the door of it.

Crag said, "I'm letting go your neck now. Yell as loud as you want, if you want to make it your last yell."

He put his left arm around the manager's body and held tight while he reached for the combination knob with his right.

The manager didn't yell, but he squeaked—and both of his hands grabbed for Crag's wrist. "Don't! It's booby-trapped, and I'll die too if I'm standing here. Let me open it."

**C**RAG GRINNED and let him open it. There was quite a bit of money in the safe, although Crag's were the only ten thousand credit bills. Crag took it all except the change and the one and five credit bills; there were so many of those that his pockets wouldn't have held all of them.

He took Carleton back with him through the secret panel and there bound and gagged him with strips torn from the manager's dress coat.

He felt good again, despite some of the things he'd seen through the passageway peepholes. And he felt a little reckless—or maybe it was the woji. He leaned forward and whispered to Carleton, "If you report this, tell them to look for Crag. On the planet Cragon." He laughed. "Crag of Cragon."

He went back up the secret stairs and passageways to his own suite. He found that he must have been gone a little longer than he thought, for both

of the women were drunk and Pete was almost so. Even Gardin's eyes were a little glassy.

Crag made all of them take sober-up powders and, since he was going to pilot the aircar and the spaceship, he himself took a neobenzedrine. He settled for a very few items out of the many things he'd bought before coming to the Luxor—all things that he could carry in his pockets so they wouldn't attract attention crossing the lobby.

"Get the money?" Gardin had asked him and he'd nodded and said, "With interest. Compound."

Maybe, he thought, they'd use that money to light fires with when they got to Cragon, but at any rate he hadn't left it with the manager of the Luxor.

They made the aircar without being questioned and Crag piloted the aircar slowly and carefully, not to attract attention, until they were well out of Marsport before he put on speed.

The spaceship was still where he'd left it, and that was good; he could have bought another—dozens of them—with all the money he had, but the delay would have been a risk.

Twenty hours later they landed on Cragon. Because the others lacked his confidence, Crag put the ship down through the atmosphere very slowly, ready to jerk it up quickly if any of them had any difficulty in breathing, but none of them had.

Just before the ship touched the surface, a voice in Crag's mind said, "Welcome, Crag." He answered mentally, not aloud, and looked at the others quickly to see if they had received any equivalent message; obviously none of them had.

**H**E PUT the ship down gently in a perfect landing and opened the door without bothering to test the

atmosphere. He stepped out, the others following him. The air was like the air of Earth on a crisp autumn morning. They were on a plain that stretched down to a river. There was short grass where they stood, bushes between them and the river; behind them was what might easily have been a forest of Earth and beyond the forest rose tall rugged mountains.

Crag liked it. He felt content and at peace.

He wondered what to do first and flashed a mental question, but there wasn't any answer—and that was answer enough. They were on their own and Cragon wasn't going to advise them.

He took a deep breath and turned to face the others. "All right," he said. "We're here. We start to work."

"Work?" Pete-Hauser's rodent face looked surprised.

"Work," said Crag. "We'll find food—there'll be game in that forest and fish in that river and we'll find some edible plants that we can domesticate and grow. But we'll have to work for all of it. All of us. And since we've got food for a few days in the ship, the first job's to build ourselves quarters. The ship's too small for five people to live in."

"Build out of what?" Gardin wanted to know.

Both Gert and Stell looked displeased and petulant. Crag stared at them and wondered what they'd expected to find on a new planet.

He answered Gardin's question within an hour. There was clay along the river bank that would dry into good adobe bricks. He vetoed Stell's suggestion that they all have a binge to celebrate—although from her face she didn't seem to think there was much to celebrate—and put all of them, including himself, to work shaping clay bricks and putting them in the sun to dry.

The others worked listlessly and none of them, even Gardin, who tried to pretend interest, got very many bricks formed. Gert cut a finger on a stone in the clay and rebelled, her dark face sullen. She sat and watched the others, angry because Crag had locked the door of the ship and had kept the key; he curtly refused to give it to her so she could get a bottle and drink.

He kept them, and himself, at work until sundown.

They slept in the ship that night, and Crag slept lightly, but nothing happened.

The next morning he put Hauser and the two women back at the brick-making and he and Gardin went into the forest and found that he'd been right in guessing that there was game, although it was small and wary and was going to take very skilled hunting to get.

That night he again refused to let them get drunk, and he could feel the resentment against him, palpable as a Venusian fog.

He slept even more lightly that night, but the break he'd been expecting didn't come until morning. It came in the form of a heatgun being shoved into his back as he was leaving the ship. Pete Hauser's voice said, "And don't try to use that metal hand of yours. I know about it. I can pull the trigger first. Keep your hands down."

Crag kept his hands down and turned around. He looked at Gardin and Gardin couldn't quite meet his eyes. He didn't have to ask if they were all in it.

Crag reached out casually and slapped the heater out of Hauser's hand—not until after Hauser had pulled the trigger, though, and nothing had happened. Crag said, "I unloaded it, unloaded all of them. All right,

Gardin, you do the talking. What do you want? To elect your own leader? Or what?"

GARDIN cleared his throat uncomfortably. "We want to go back, Crag. None of us have ever lived—wild, like this. We find we don't like it. We'd rather take our chances on Earth or Mars. We don't care whether you come with us or not, just so we get back."

Gert said, "But if you don't, if you're staying here, you might as well give us some—or all—of that money you've got. It's no good to you here."

Stell's voice was plaintive. "Please let us go, Crag. Or if you want the ship, take us back and then come here yourself."

Crag said, "I'm going to think it over. I'll be back."

He walked toward the forest, thinking. It was going to be lonesome and yet—well, he *wasn't* going back, ever. And to have others here wasn't any good unless they wanted to be here.

He tried thinking messages to Cragon, to get Cragon's advice, but there wasn't any answering voice in his mind. He was being left strictly alone in his decision.

He walked back to the spaceship and the four people waiting for him there.

He said, "Okay, take the ship and get out. Unload everything in it I can use and then take it. And here—" He took off the money belt with almost three hundred thousand credits in it and tossed it to them. "Divide this on the way. I'll give you the key to the controls when you've unloaded the ship."

They worked fast, willingly this time, obviously afraid he might change his mind.

An hour later, standing beside a

tarpaulin covered pile of supplies that represented everything movable that had been in the ship, he watched it go.

He felt dull inside, neither happy nor unhappy. This was the way it was going to be. This was his world, and here he was going to stay until he died. He'd be lonesome, sure, but he was used to that. And, even alone, this was better than the cesspools of Earth, Mars or Venus. He'd thought once that having a fortune might make those places worth living in; he'd found out that it had made them worse.

He watched the speck out of sight in the blue and then sighed and started for the river to carry on with his brick-making. That still came first—or he thought then that it did.

But he'd taken only a few steps when the voice that was Cragon spoke in his mind.

"They were too soft, Crag. They weren't tough, like you are, tough enough to lick a new planet. I knew when I first contacted their minds that they wouldn't stay."

"Yeah," said Crag listlessly.

"That is why I waited," said the voice in his mind. "I made sure *you* wanted to stay here, even if it was to be alone. But it won't be alone, Crag."

"Yeah," Crag said. He supposed it wouldn't be quite so lonely if Cragon talked to him once in a while.

There was something in his mind like laughter, not his own. The voice said, "No, not I, Crag. I have other things to do, and this may be the last time I ever communicate with you. I mean—Evadne."

Crag stopped walking as though he had run into a stone wall.

"Remember what happened to Evadne, Crag? The disintegrator, yes.



But every atom of her body remained, on the surface of the tiny ball of neutronium that I became, before she was disintegrated. It was simple to segregate them and preserve them, Crag, against your return. And I was conscious, Crag, a conscious entity, even before she disintegrated. The structure of her body and her mind was the first thing I studied, before I entered *your* mind, out there when I first spoke to you."

Crag's mind reeled. "*But she's dead. You can't—*"

"What is death, Crag? Can you define it for me? Can you tell me why, if every atom is replaced into its position in every molecule, just as it was—"

"*But can you? Are you sure?*"

"I have. She's coming this way now, Crag, from the edge of the woods. If you'll only turn, you'll see her coming."

Crag turned and saw her. He started to run toward her and saw the gladness in her face when she saw him coming.

"You won't need to explain, Crag; I've told her everything that has happened. Goodbye, Crag; I'm leaving your mind now."

Crag may or may not have answered that thought in his mind. He had his arms around Evadne, her soft body pressed against his. And they had a world of their own, a new world, to live in—and to populate.

## THE COMPLICATED ATOM



by RAMSEY SINCLAIR



ONE OF THE major aims of science is to make things simple, to reduce the complex activities of natural events to a series of easy, simple rules. But things seldom work out that way. From about nineteen hundred on, science has been getting more and more complicated and the nice understandable theories of the time prior to that period, are no longer extant. Instead despite quantum theory and relativity in physics, for example and despite our tremendous increase in general knowledge, we find that we really know less of the fundamentals now than ever before!

Consider the atom. Before nineteen hundred the simple atom of electrons whirling around a tiny nucleus satisfied everybody and explained so much. As the probing got stronger and the tools of the physicists more powerful, it appeared that the atom was a whole lot more complicated than anyone thought. Protons, electrons, neutrons, mesons, positrons, photons and God knows what else stepped on the stage.

In recent years with the uncovering of atomic energy, things are deteriorating at an accelerated rate. Every time a nice simple theory is proposed some scientist throws a monkey wrench in the works. The best example of that in recent months is the discovery of two British physicists who have uncovered two short-lived atomic

—or rather, sub-atomic—particles.

In examining photographic plates which had been exposed to cosmic radiation, they noted the trails or tracks left by two unknown particles whose presence could not be explained in any known terms. Certain facts about them were apparent however.

Particle no. one is neutral to start with, then splits into a forked track consisting of two particles. Particle no. two starts out with a track, then abruptly turns indicating that it has split into a charged and neutral particle.

But what is most amazing is the fact that these sub-atomic particles have the short life of about ten-billionths of a second! Anything else about them is strictly unknown. Their purpose, their peculiar properties—none of these things are understood.

But what is worse, the scientists predict that undoubtedly as more is learned about the atom, it will be discovered that that little devil is a lot more complex than anyone thought it was. There is no simple explanation.

But the boys in the labs haven't thrown up their hands yet. They'll keep hammering away and pretty soon some good theorist will settle and have a nice clear explanation of everything—until a few years later when the lab boys knock it out again...

# THE INSCRUTABLE GOD

★ by SANDY MILLER ★

**S**PACEMEN are a superstitious lot. They wear rings and charms and amulets. They carry strange devices and their bodies are tattooed with prayers whose very sound is gibberish. They believe in omens, signs and portents and the mysterious is common to them even though they work with the finest machines that science can provide.

Farrane was a spacemen, and even among that hyper-superstitious clan he was regarded as peculiar, for around his neck, suspended from a leather thong, bulky, weighty and awkward, he wore a heavy plaque of metal. On this plaque was inscribed in a strange Venerian dialect whose odd alphabetic characters look like little spears, a prayer to the god of Heat, the ultimate consuming god.

They needled and joked and kidded with Farrane. They laughed at him and giped at his strange and particularly prominent talisman. "You'll get round-shouldered carrying that load of titanium around," they'd joke. "You'll make more money in a foundry," they'd laugh, but Farrane would smile enigmatically and continue to do his work—he was an engineman third class—and say little, enduring the ribbing with perfect equanimity.

The "girls" who infest every spaceman's bar from Terra to Pluto, would ridicule Farrane but they'd be just as glad to take his credits as the next.

But Farrane had the last laugh.

Coane is a spaceport on the Callistan fringe group. It's wild and wide open and the Terrans there who run the place are outnumbered a hundredfold by the weird powerful semi-humans, the natives, the Callistans. Great dragon-like creatures,

their tentacular bodies are enough to drive a sane man mad. And when they manage to get liquor—which they occasionally do in spite of the strictest regulations—they are sheer hell. They go insane with a killers' lust and God help anyone in the vicinity.

Farrane was in the Green Lamp, a hangout as rugged as can be. He was quietly drinking, talking with a girl and ignoring the boisterous roistering crowd when a Callistan—"undulated" is the best word—in. He was completely drunk on some powerful beverage and before a single weapon could be drawn, he had cleared the room of living flesh using his seven arms and four steel bars,—small I-beams—they were—to crush into death's insensibility, the roomful of humans.

He paused before the terror-stricken Farrane who stood with an arm about the frightened girl. His hideous face wrinkled with thought and he brought back an arm to lever it across the humans. His single eye fell on Farrane's amulet, the titanium plate with Venerian script. He stopped his arm in mid-air and turned away.

They killed him a short time after, but the miraculous story of Farrane's escape made the rounds. The queer link between the Callistan and the Venerian amulet hasn't been explained but a half dozen anthropologists are working on the connection.

They think the Callistans were once a higher people who visited or migrated from Venus.

Farrane doesn't talk about it. He just wears his amulet and smiles!

★ ★ ★

# THE MAMMOTH SLEEPER

★ by CHARLES RECOUR ★

**T**HE STALINGRAD MUSEUM was dark. Its ponderous bronze doors were closed for the night and only the peculiar legend in strange Cyrillic characters proclaimed that chaste granite was a repository for the panorama of natural history.

In the vast rotunda of the huge building was the prize exhibit. It rested in a glass case of tremendous size looking for all the world, in its extreme simplicity, like a gigantic ice-cube—which in effect, it was. For behind the cage of three-inch glass reposed the carcass of one of the most imposing beasts to tread the Earth, and it

was frozen solid in its huge refrigerator. The gigantic Woolly Mammoth poised with one leg raised, its trunk high in the air and its mighty tusks prepared to gouge or strike.

But to Boris the janitor, this was no novelty. He passed the case without even looking at it. His flashlight remained glued on the floor guiding him to the stair-well that led to the power-room. He must not fail to see that the refrigerating mechanism worked. He could hear the words of the director saying, "Never—you understand?—never must the pumps go

out. We must keep this perfect specimen frozen. To try and mount or embalm it would be a crime. Remember that Boris, or..." And Boris shuddered and promised he would remember. He didn't want the wrath of the authorities to descend upon him.

But it had been a hard day and after checking the dials and gauges of the powerful refrigerating mechanism, Boris sat back and relaxed. It was so warm and comfortable in the power room. Pretty soon he nodded...

For thirty thousand years Tanugh had been glaciated, for thirty thousand years, the miniature mind of the mammoth had been empty of everything, a cold darkness, a nothingness. He could not think—not as we know it,—but suddenly and clearly consciousness came to the beast. He felt cold, numbingly cold, but with a subtle warmth he dared to move, and his limbs responded!

The massive bulk of Tanugh shivered, trembled and swayed a little. But the in-

herent abilities were not to be denied. Tentatively he put forth his foot. Softly, gently he walked across the floor, the massive bracings shivering with his weight and bulk.

The tusks struck the glass and shattered it into a thousand pieces. Jagged shards of glass pierced and annoyed Tanugh. His trunk rose and the peculiar wailing cry of his kind spilled from his throat. He cried like a lost human soul—and strode across the floor...

Boris, aroused by the noise and sounds of shattering glass, incautiously appeared in the monster's path. The pulp that had been a human being was ground into the floor...

They killed Tanugh, they killed him with rifle bullets, and he stands once more in the museum, but the luster is gone from his eye and no glass case surrounds his stuffed and padded bulk. Tanugh came back once, came back across the gap of eons, but not this time...

★ ★ ★

## COMING ROCKET CAR

★

by JOHN WESTON

★

FROM THE letters we've received about the numerous articles we've run on steam engines, you'd think the world was coming apart. We had better make our position clear before you tear us to bits. We realize that the internal combustion engine is more efficient than the *present* steam engine. There's no arguing that but what we're saying is that if engineers spent as much time developing a steam engine as they did on gas engines, they'd turn out a beauty. And we believe that.

The steam engine is clean, smooth and quiet with no vibration and a minute fraction of the wear and tear of a gasoline engine. Furthermore, while it is bound to less efficient than the gasoline engine because it burns its fuel *outside* working chamber, it must be remembered that it can better almost any kind of inferior fuel which a gas engine can't do.

That summarizes our position. Because this is now an age of jets, turbines, (gas and steam) and rockets, we feel that more engineering should be put into the development of a practical simple steam engine burning a liquid fuel and suitable for automotive use.

There are many people who run steam engine cars and we've heard of a hobbyist who has powered his home and shop with a steam engine-driven electric generator—at a very low cost. Maintenance on a steam engine is slight too.

China has gone directly from a no power

civilization to one using the gas engine. We'd like to recommend to Chinese engineers an investigation of the steam engine. They might do wonders. And in many parts of the world today, including the United States, there are steam engine and steam turbines in operation which were built more than eighty years ago and *are still running!*

The inconvenience of an external boiler and furnace we'll put up with. Get us a steam engine driven car, please, Santa Claus, please?

All joking aside, we believe firmly in what we say. And we suspect that the future is going to spring some surprises along that line. A lot of men have begun to investigate the problem.

Until then of course, we'll get along with the gasoline engine but we don't have to like it—and we don't. Noisy, fummy, inefficient, subject to breakdown, and requiring plenty of maintenance, they're a headache, but since they get us from one place to another rather nicely, we'll bear with them. But don't be surprised if you see a Stanley Steamer bearing the name. "The Rocket"—it'll probably be driven by us.

And in case you're inclined to laugh, remember that back in nineteen oh eight, just such a buggy did better than a hundred miles an hour and it wasn't wide open! The driver didn't dare trust the flimsy chassis—but the engine was *all* there—and then some!



Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted by ROG PHILLIPS

**D**ON DAY, chairman of the NORWESCON COMMITTEE, at my invitation has written a guest editorial to bring to the readers of *AMAZING STORIES* a first hand report of that big annual get-together of science fiction and fantasy fans. Reading it over brought back memories of last year's Cinvention, held at Cincinnati Ohio.

It was the first fan convention I had ever attended. I went down with Ray Palmer. He was editor of *Amazing* then. Now he sort of runs *Other Worlds* with the help of Bea Mahaffey, his managing editor, whom he discovered at the Cinvention. Over numerous coffees there he discovered she had more science fiction at her fingertips than he did. A catalogue mind plus an uncanny judgment on what stories that have appeared in print were good stories. Now she is finding out through experience that the reason there are often bad stories in magazines is because they help the good ones sound better by comparison.

I had been asked to make a speech, and had cooked up a good reason to decline. The last speech I had made was in Freshman English at Gonzaga University, and I had had a very peculiar experience then. I had started talking. The next thing I knew I was trying to catch onto my tongue and also trying to hear what I was saying. I had blacked out completely and kept on talking. I never did find out what I said, but I got some pitying looks as I took my seat. It's the only time in my life I didn't know what I was doing. If I had had a gun in my hand and Father Sprague, the prof, had been lying dead at my feet when I snapped out of my blackout, I honestly wouldn't have been able to tell whether I was responsible. So next time you read of someone *not knowing* whether they did it or not, don't scoff. From my own personal experience I can tell you that a person actually can go blank for a few minutes while appearing not to.

Almost a full year has passed since the convention at Cincinnati. The things that still stand out in memory aren't the details of the speeches made, or anything else on the program. It's the meet-

ing of people you've heard of or corresponded with. It's the original drawing or painting you bought at the auction. And the little things. Like Hannes Bok drawing his famous Bok mouse in the steam on a bakery window on the way back from a chili palace where some of us went with him, and Milt Rothman not knowing who I was until he read my autograph in his Cincon memory book after I had written it there, and the waitress at the Hickory Grill in Newark spilling soup down Forry Ackerman's back. Not to mention Ray Palmer and I being held up in Jackson, Michigan, for three hours while he waited for my baggage to come on the next train.

This year the convention is being held in Portland, Oregon. In some ways Portland and Cincinnati are very much alike. In Don Day's editorial he will tell you all about it. I remember Portland before the war when you could get the finest meal in town at Cody's for seventy cents, and six dollars a day was good wages.

If you've never been out west you can't possibly go to Portland and back without passing through scenery you'd never dream exists. There are just plain rocks out there bigger than the Empire State Building in New York. Not in downtown Portland or anywhere near it, but on the way out there to the West Coast.

The great Kaiser shipyards that built all those Liberty ships were at Portland—or rather, on the Washington side of the Columbia River within sight of Portland. Seattle is just two hundred miles north of Portland. There you have Puget Sound where the Pacific Ocean comes inland around the Olympic mountain range to give a vacationland without equal anywhere in the world.

So if you plan on attending the Norwescon and you don't live on the West Coast, if you can possibly do it make your plans include at least two weeks of just traveling around out there. Grand Coulee, Yellowstone, Puget Sound, up the Columbia from Portland along the Columbia River Highway, and all the thousands of miles of scenery that's just too magnificent to describe adequately.

And now we'll turn it over to Don Day,



chairman of the NORWESCON COMMITTEE. He'll tell you just what to expect at the Eighth Annual World Science-Fiction Convention.

\* \* \*

This coming Labor Day weekend, Portland, Oregon will be the scene of the most exciting event in 1950 for all those interested in science-fiction and fantasy. September 1 thru 4 will be the dates of the NORWESCON, the Eighth World Science-Fiction Convention.

For those who have attended previous conventions, little need be said. For others, it is rather hard to put into words what goes to make every moment of these too few days so wonderful. One can enumerate events, tell of the interesting features on the program, of the interesting and congenial people one will meet, but still you must attend a convention to get the full feeling which can be duplicated nowhere else.

The NORWESCON is the eighth of a series of international conventions which, except for the war years, have been held annually since 1939. There you will have the opportunity to meet and talk with many of your favorite authors, editors and the fans who have become known to you thru the letter columns of the prozines. There will be talks on all phases of science fiction and fantasy; writing, collecting, fanzine publishing, etc. There will be panel discussions and forums where you can express your opinions and question and answer periods where you can learn much of the inside story of things past and future. There will be an auction of donated material, where you may purchase original illustrations from your favorite magazines, rare books and other collectors' items you will want to own. There will be a banquet and a costume ball, with prizes for the best costume. There will be entertainment of all sorts.

All that will be on the planned program, but that is only a small part of the fun you're going to have at the NORWESCON. What really makes the convention is the people who will be there. There will be many of the top authors. Already planning to come are such people as George O. Smith, Rog Phillips, Bea Mahaffey, Howard Browne, editor of *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures*; Doc Keller, E. E. Smith and many others. Prominent fans such as Bob Tucker, Rick Sneary (of the unbelievable spelling), Forrie Ackerman, and Art Rapp will attend. And in addition, there will be scores of people who just read and enjoy science-fiction.

Between sessions of the convention, there will be ample time to get acquainted with everyone. Some of the best times at the convention will be at these bull sessions. You can discuss his latest story with your favorite author, compare

notes on pen-names with other fans, hear anecdotes of past fan events from some of the old time fans. You will indulge in wild discussions on everything from Korzybski to Shaver in all-night bull sessions in smoke-filled hotel rooms. You will make scores of new friendships and renew old ones.

Until you have met a few fans, you will be astonished at how congenial they can be. It is hard to put a finger on, but it seems that everyone interested in fantasy and science-fiction shares a wide range of interests extending far outside the field. You will find yourself gabbing with some complete stranger five minutes after you meet, as if you had known him for years. Graybeards will be engaged in frenzied discussions with sixteen-year-olds, the gap of years swept away by the flood of their common interests.

Portland, Oregon, the convention city, lies in the heart of the world-famous Northwest playground. From all directions, the approach to Portland is scenic. The railroads and the highway from the east pass thru the scenic Columbia Gorge, past Bonneville Dam, Multnomah Falls and a host of other vistas of breathtaking beauty. Within a couple of hours travel are those mentioned as well as Timberline Lodge at Mt. Hood, the Oregon Beaches and many other spots of interest. From Council Crest, atop Portland's West Hills, five snowcapped mountains can be seen at once as well as a panorama of Portland spread out below. This is a ten-minute bus ride from downtown Portland.

Portland is served by several railroads, Greyhound and Trailways Bus lines and the major air lines. A unique feature of the Portland train situation is that you can come from the east by one route and return by another without extra fare. For example, you have the choice of coming or going by way of anywhere from Los Angeles to British Columbia at no extra expense except for your berth for the extra nights spent on the road. Taking advantage of this fact, Bob Tucker is arranging a group migration to be called "Via Pullman to Portland". The idea is to get a full Pullman carload (28) to leave Chicago Saturday noon, August 26. They will proceed to Los Angeles, arriving Monday noon and picking up additional recruits there. They will leave LA Wednesday night, arriving in Portland Friday morning. They will linger in Portland till the middle of the week and arrive back in Chicago on Saturday, Sept 9. Fare including Berth is \$151 for a lower and \$139 in an upper. If interested, contact Bob Tucker, Box 260, Bloomington, Ill.

There are several hotels close to the convention hall, the American Legion Club auditorium. The auditorium itself is a large hall with a stage and balcony, ideal



for our purpose. There is an excellent restaurant and other club facilities in the building which is located at the edge of the business district, out of the congested area.

Preliminary financing for the convention is done thru memberships in the NORWESCON COMMITTEE. The membership fee is \$1 and each member receives a membership card, lithoed on a special fluorescent stock that does remarkable things under black light, a supply of stickers (8 designs) advertising the NORWESCON to be used on your correspondence as well as two souvenir proof-sheets of the sticker designs, copies of the pre-convention fanzines giving developments as they occur, and a copy of the souvenir Convention Program Booklet. The first issue of NORWESCON NEWS is now ready, giving in its 8 lithographed pages much more about the NORWESCON. Every member will also have his name and address listed in the NORWESCON NEWS.

The NORWESCON will be the big event of the year for all those interested in science-fiction and fantasy. By becoming a member, you are doing your part to support fandom's No. 1 event of 1950. Send your dollar today to NORWESCON, Box 8517, Portland 7, Oregon.

Donald B. Day, Chairman,  
NORWESCON COMMITTEE

We now come to the fanzine reviews. Remember my invitation to fan eds to write their own reviews, provided they also send the fanzine with it? Two have responded to date, and their reviews are given first position this month.—R.G.

FAN-FARE: bi-monthly; 15c, 6/65c; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York. The latest issue of this fiction fanzine comes out with eighteen of its twenty pages mimeographed. It has its first real cover, and one that actually illustrates a story inside.

Andrew Duane, a new fan author introduced by FAN-FARE, leads off with the first portion of his two-part story, THE MASTERS OF LOUAEN. It's strictly adventure-fantasy of the Burroughs kind, ending conventionally with the protagonist becoming unconscious as "cold hands fasten about him" in a pitch-black tunnel which is filled with enemies. Twelve more pages of this story are due for the next, the July, issue to complete it, so this is really a long one.

Another serial also is featured, the conclusion to THE THIRD SPHERE, a horror story by Al Leverentz, a fan writer from North Tonawanda, whose first story also appeared in FAN-FARE. This story is unanimously regarded by FAN-FARE'S readers as close to professional quality, although its author is strictly

amateur. Rounding out the issue are two short-short stories, THE TRUTH ABOUT MR. LITTLECHIP, by Tom Covington, a parody of a story in the first issue of FAN-FARE; and also EXPEDITION ANTARCTIC, by J. Howard Palmer, a tale of (what else?) the antarctic.

Book reviews of THE KINGSLAYER, THE CARNELIAN CUBE, and THE BOOK OF PTATH are adequately handled by Lee Gann and Eugene DeWeese; and a very good poem by Karen O'Brien is likewise included, FIRE AND ICE.

To the best of my knowledge this is the only fanzine which at present publishes only fan fiction, so it's a good one to have.

SCIENCE AND SCIENCE FANTASY FICTION REVIEW: 15c; four copies for 50c; 7c straight to members of the AMERICAN SCIENCE-FANTASY SOCIETY. Calvin Thos. Beck, P. O. Box 877, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, N. Y. SASFFR being an official zine for its national fan club, the A.S.F.S., also is of general interest to other fans the world over.

With this second issue, SASFFR shows immediate improvement over its first effort with additional contents through superior printing and a new method of actually publishing over eleven and a half pages where nine would normally be. With the third number due next month, SASFFR will soar from 10 pages of reading matter to approximately 5 or 6 pages more, or about a total of 16 pages in bulk, not counting the special printing process, of which the latter would bring it up to 20 or more pages of reading matter.

In the May issue, there is a revealing article by Chas. Wm. E. Alithia, Ph.D., "A Summary And Truths Relating to the Flying Saucer", a thought provoking article regarding what "under cover" work our country's scientific resources are now doing in furthering the progress of our nation; a very revealing and amazing description of "what may be" going on right now under our noses. Eight other interesting and inimitable pages are comprised of events and news in scientific experiments and events which are not only true and authoritative but exciting, such as "The Ancient Cult" which existed for centuries and died only recently behind the "Iron Curtain"; "A Gorilla Taught to Act Human", plus additional news and information about STFantasy authors, fandom, SF books, fanzine reviews and digests of same; unbiased reports on almost everything occurring in fandom, STFantasy literature and on anything that's occurred or will transpire in the future.—As several have already and truthfully said after reading SASFFR: "...this new zine is STFandom's 'Walter Winchell'"; and that is true since those who run SASFFR fail

to toady or wear kid-gloves on anything but call 'em as they see them.

**SCIENCE FICTION WEEKLY:** 5c, \$1/26 wks; Ronald Friedman, 1980 East 8th St, Brooklyn 23, N. Y. Ron is fast becoming one of the more prolific editors in fandom. We have on hand the first four issues of one of his latest ventures, a mimeoed weekly zine containing articles, interviews with stf notables, and new developments in the fan and pro worlds. Comparing the first issue with the succeeding ones, the improvements are remarkable. The number of pages has been doubled, the mimeography has improved 100%, the quality of material presented is consistently better and Chabot is turning in a fine job as cover artist. Ron has entered the fan publishing field with a sincerity and determination that make S.F. Weekly a zine worth subscribing to—why don't you send for a copy and see for yourself.

**GRAVEYARD:** monthly; 15c, \$1.50/yr; Richard Dittmar, 509 West 183rd St, New York 33, NY. In this second issue of Graveyard, the number of pages has been increased to allow for the publishing of stories of greater length. You'll find "The House" by Paul Twanson, and the first installment of two two-part stories, "Out of Nowhere" by Richard Ditt-

mar and "Apostles Creed" by Charles Paoli, presented in the current issue. The experience gained in putting out the first Graveyard is shown in the improved overall appearance of the zine and in the material presented. You devotees of the weird and horror-type fiction send in your fifteen cents for a copy of "Fandom's Weirdest Zine."

**ORB:** bi-monthly; 15c, 6/75c; Bob Johnson, 811 9th St, Greeley, Colorado. This legal-sized zine is a neatly put together combination of multilith, mimeo and ditto. The April-May issue (No. 4) is one you won't want to miss. In addition to a cover by Ralph Rayburn Phillips, their usual amount of good fiction and poetry and the regular features ORB presents as a special attraction three pages of stills from the movie "The Wizard of Oz". Bob has a fine zine here, the material is of good quality, the reproduction is fine, and if you pass up this Wizard of Oz special feature, you'll never forgive yourself.

**SCIENCE-FANTASY REVIEW:** quarterly; 25c; Walter Gillings, 115 Wanstead Park Rd, Ilford, Essex, England. Walt's S-F Review is one of the more professional fanzines put out, and this Spring issue is well worth having. The cover features a still from the forth-com-

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ing movie "Destination Moon" with an accompanying article by Forrest Ackerman. Also in this issue are articles on Gernsback and Merritt, as well as Arthur C. Clarke's "Spaceships of Fiction". This is the last issue of S-F Review, as such. With the next issue it will become SCIENCE-FANTASY, published by Nova Publications, retaining Walt as editor. In addition to the regular S-FR features such as the book reviews, Fantasia, etc. SCIENCE-FANTASY will present fiction by some of England's leading stf authors. Walt has worked hard turning out S-FR, and he has our best wishes for the success of this new undertaking.

**FANTASY-TIMES:** bi-weekly; 10c, 12/\$1; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave, Flushing, NY. We have on hand both of the April issues of F-T, in which Jimmy presents the latest news and views in science-fiction. You'll find articles on Walt Gilling's new mag, the new Amazing policy, the lifting of the Australian ban on American stf mags, and the latest information on stf books, films and personalities. We've said it before, and we're saying it again—if you want to keep up with what's happening in science-fiction circles, subscribe to FANTASY TIMES.

**SPACE MAGAZINE:** quarterly; 25c, \$1/yr; Clyde T. Hanback, 621 Third St, NW, Washington 1, D.C. The cover of the Spring issue depicts a scene from the film "Destination Moon", while on the inside you'll find articles by Forrest Ackerman and Clyde Hanback. The story "Affinity" is a well-written suspense yarn by James R. Adams dealing with psychic affinity ala The Corsican Brothers.

**SCIENCE, FANTASY, AND SCIENCE-FICTION:** quarterly; 65c; Franklin M. Dietz Jr, P. O. Box 696, Kings Park, L. I., NY. This is a special issue entitled the Cinvention Supplement. The cover is a photo of "Miss Science-Fiction" standing before the backdrop painting which decorated the stage of the 7th World Science-Fiction Convention. You'll find here a report of the Cinvention proceedings, complete with fan interviews and photos of such pros and fans as "Doc" Smith, Ray Palmer, Ted Carnell, Milt Rothman, Don Ford and many others. Published by the SF & S-F Amateur Press, this booklet makes a good souvenir of the Cinvention, and serves as a reminder to join the Norwescon, the 8th World Science-Fiction Convention.

**SPACEWARP:** Monthly; 15c, 2/25c; Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay St, Saginaw, Mich. Art's decrepit mimeo machine has been pressed into service once more, and the May Spacewarp emerges with a choice selection of articles by some of fandom's BNF'S. In fact, the contents page

of this issue sounds like a "Who's Who" of fandom; Tucker, Rapp, Sneary, Boggs, Nelson, Conner, Watkins, Nelson (Sherman), Stuart, McConnell, Lawrence, and Craig. The material covered ranges from Rapp's *Timber*, which is appropriately subtitled "Minor Musings, Much Midg-etized" to Stuart's "Prelude to Insurgency." To attempt to single out any particular article from the above line-up is next to impossible—just send in your 15c and you'll see what we mean.

**AD-O-ZINE:** Monthly, 2c stamp per issue, W. C. Butts, 2058 E Atlantic St., Philadelphia 34, Pa. A 4" x 6" zine devoted exclusively to ads. AD-O-ZINE will be published bi-monthly this summer, but will return to a monthly schedule with the October issue. If you have some books or magazines to sell or trade, or if you're trying to locate a particular item for your collection, why don't you take an ad in or subscribe to Bill's mag. A 2c stamp brings you an issue of the zine, or you can take a 4" x 6" ad for only 30c, repeats of the same ad cost 15c.

**SCIENCE AND CULTURE:** Monthly; 12c, 12/\$1; Stanley E. Crouch, Sterling, Va. This is the third issue of the official organ of The United Scientific and Cultural Organization, International. S & C is a 12 page mimeoed zine devoted to articles of a varied nature. Under the science category you'll find articles on psychiatry, rocketry, archaeology, chemistry, physics, etc; on the cultural side are articles dealing with religion, history, philosophy, art, music and literature. S & C can use articles on any of the above or related subjects but all material must be non-fiction.

**FANFARE:** Bi-monthly; 15c, 6/65c; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Road, N. Tonawanda, N.Y. With this issue of FANFARE the publishers have switched over to mimeography, with the exception of the cover, which is still hectoed. The mimeoing was expertly done, and resulted in twenty pages of neat, easily read fiction, features and poetry. The cover illo is by Curtis Stewart, illustrating a scene from Andy Duane's "The Masters of Louaen". In the last issue Andy wrote about Frank Seller, an earthman who suddenly found himself on Mars paying a visit to John Carter. This present story continues the adventures of Seller as he once again journeys to another world. In addition to Andy's very capable contribution (which, by the way, is the first part of a two-part serial), there are stories by Tom Covington, Al Leverentz, and J. Howard Palmer as well as a poem by Keran O'Brien and the regular FANFARE features.

**SPACESHIP:** Quarterly; 5c; Bob Sil-

verberg and Saul Diskin, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N.Y. This issue contains an article "Electricity in Medicine" by Saul, the first installment of a two-part serial, and several short stories. One story, a short-short by Bob entitled "Overconfidence" will catch the eye of fans since it deals with one of stf's most well-known themes—the triumph of insects over men. In this story, the insects refer to the low intellects of the human, with the exception of "...a small group... who called themselves 'fans'" and who predicted the rivalry between insects and men in their "...apparently sacred books called 'pulp' ....". Where do they get that 'apparently sacred' idea, anyway?

**BEM:** Bi-monthly; 10c, 3/25c; John R. Kalas, 146 Ridgewood St SE, Grand Rapids 8, Michigan. A mimeoed zine presenting fiction, articles, poetry and features. This is the first issue of BEM, and is being distributed free upon request as an introductory offer. Why don't you drop John a line asking for this copy of the zine and then send in a letter of criticism, constructive or otherwise. Or, if you feel unusually ambitious, sit down at your typewriter and batter out a story, poem or article and send it to John, he's issued a request for material in his editorial.

**FANTASY ADVERTISER:** Bi-monthly; 6/75c, 8/31; Roy A. Squires, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif. A beautifully planographed zine containing fiction, articles, features and classified ads. The cover is the now famous spaceship and lunar landscape by Bonestell for the film Destination Moon. The interior illustrations are by Arfstrom, Carter, Gaughan and Grossman. The stories and articles in FA are excellent, but the main feature of course is the book and magazine ads by book-dealers and fans selling out collections. You'll find everything here from the latest stf books published to out-of-print, hard-to-find items.

**- ODD:** Bi-monthly; 10c; 3/25c; Duggie Fisher, 1302 Lester St, Poplar Bluff, Mo. Top place in this issue goes to Warren Baldwin, for his article "How Stfiends Read Their Promags.". Warren divides fans into seven groups; the Grave Digger type, the Easy Going type, the Bank Teller, the Neophytic Noodle-Noggin, the Drool, the Beastly Bored, and last (but far from least) the Graduate or Acti-Fan. Send Duggie a dime and discover which group YOU fit into—or don't you have the courage to face it?

THE END



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# FACTS OF THE FUTURE

by LYNN STANDISH

## THE VANISHING MUSCLES...

IT'S EASY to prove anything with statistics—in fact concerning them there is a definition which goes, “there are three kinds of lies—lies, damned lies, and statistics.” In spite of the reprehensible attitude we must maintain toward statistics which have been so abused by publicity men and advertising media, we must realize that fundamentally they can tell us a great deal about the world in which we live.

There is a statistic of singular interest now available after a survey of American production plants by authorities interested in mechanization. This statistic shows that every American worker has at his beck and call, in the form of electrically powered tools, about *thirty assistants*, equal to himself in producing ability! This statistic is further amplified and illuminated by the fact that a great portion of this assistance comes in the form of fractional horse-power motored tools.

Now just what do these things mean?—and what bearing have they on the future?

That sounds like a simple question which shouldn't be hard to answer. The trouble is that it would take reams of paper to do justice to it. But we can infer from the facts quite a few interesting promises. Three great, important promises emerge from those simple statistics. One, factories are going to become more automatic all the time. Two, human muscles are becoming less and less important. Three, human beings are going to see a time eventually when practically all material things will be available to them.

Consider the first case: in many fields at present, factories for producing many things ranging from chemicals to small parts to steel mills, operate with a bare minimum of human supervision. Automatic machinery is developing to the point where it can successfully do anything humans can do and better—with the result that humans are needed merely for supervisory capacities. Humans become designers, button pushers and watchers.

In the second case, where automaticity cannot be used and there are many cases where this is true and will be true for a long time to come, humans will be assisted by the electric motor and the soleloid. Machines, including all sorts of hand tools are so efficient that they multiply any producer's ability many-fold.

This second case is really the present stage of events. We are substituting

electricity for muscles everywhere until now it doesn't make any difference whether or not you weigh a hundred and twenty or a hundred and ninety pounds—you can do the job.

The third case which promises man freedom from labor—in almost any sense and yet provides wealth to everyone, places a terrific premium on brains. This is why education is so important. Machinery will eventually bring the world around to the point where people will work for a very short time—and their work will be primarily that involved in maintenance and design and repair. The skills will be above all, mental.

This golden promise of a world resides in the development of inanimate metals, surging electricity and the power locked within the atom. O happy day...

## THE FINAL WEAPON...

WHOEVER YOU ARE, reading this, don't think too unkindly of me. For all I know you may be a creature as alien from my species as I am from an Earthly insect. Perhaps what I have to say may not disturb you. But before I go on, let me confess. I have just killed my friend.

Yes, his body lies in the laboratory two steps away. I shot him just as he turned to face me. “Is that you, Paul?” he asked, and I said, “Yes, Frank—I'm sorry.” And I shot him, shot him cold-bloodedly and mercilessly. I can still see the pitiful look on his face as he slumped to the floor. And to make sure I emptied the gun into him.

Well whether you understand the feeling we humans of the thirty-first century have for each other or not is really of no importance. I told the above event so that in case you are of a human type you may understand the tortured complex motives that inspired me to do this terrible deed.

Frank and I have been research scientists for a long time. We shared this work on cosmic radiation here on this bleak Plutonian station, enjoying and savoring our fascinating work to the fullest.

Two days ago we discovered the “Anderson effect” as we christened it—my name is Anderson and Paul indulged my vanity—but an eternity has since passed. I feel as if I'd lived and died a thousand times.



The Anderson effect, you see, is the ultimate weapon.

The Anderson effect is the alpha and omega of all life in the Universe.

The complexities and details—God forbid—I won't even suggest. This discovery is merely the final push-button which man has been talking about since the invention of the atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb. All Paul and I need have done was to touch a trigger and the Solar System would vanish in radiation, a wave-front which would sweep out with the speed of light and trigger off into atomic incandescence, every bit of matter in the Universe! And this effect would go on and on until for lack of matter, it ceased—which might be never.

We talked about it, did Paul and I. We thought about it. We didn't sleep. We knew that this secret must never again come to men and it probably would not have come to us save by the sheerest and most outrageous tricks of all chance.

But Paul wanted to communicate the discovery at least to the Solar Council to have them bury it. But that is ridiculous. I told Paul that, but he remained stubborn and adamant. Unfortunately I knew that I would have to complete the third act of this Greek tragedy.

I've done that. Paul lies dead. As soon as I fire the station and destroy every evidence of our existence, except for this document which I'm burying through a beam a thousand feet into solid rock, I'm going to commit suicide. I am too dangerous to live. I hold too much power to tempt me always. Paul and I are really no longer humans. Mark well what I have said...

★ ★ ★

### SURPRISE!

**H**ARLEY WESSON let the nose of the *Venture I* drop lower and lower. The sleek body of the rocket edged down into the vaporous sight-blocking clouds. Harley's eyes were glued to his controls, always watching the tell-tale radar altimeter which told him how far above tangible matter he was.

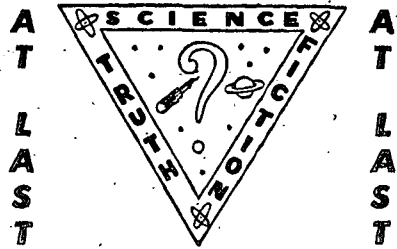
Through the ports nothing could be seen. The arrival of Man on Venus apparently was going to go unheralded. Wesson turned to his partner:

"What do you make out?" He asked Jess Frale.

Jess took his eyes from the infra-red scope. "Not a thing yet," he replied slowly. "The murk is too thick or we're still too high." He muttered half to himself: "The Martian landing was twice as easy."

Delicately the two men maneuvered their bulky torpedo "Venuswards", the *Venture I* responding perfectly to the touch of hand and the guidance of brain.

## HEY! STFANS!



### A MEANS OF RECOGNITION for us fans!

I have designed a pin that is totally symbolic—the shape and design (shown above, twice actual size) and even the colors (black, green, and gold) all have a Science Fictional meaning. This isn't a cheap trinket, either. Made to give you years of service. Equipped with a safety-clasp so it won't lose easily. The price—one buck (tax and post. incl.). I wanted to charge less, but old man High Expenses told me not to. This pin is just the thing for you fans who have your own clubs or fanzines, or attend the conventions, or who just want to know each other. If you would like to start a club, toss in a dime and as soon as I get my lists compiled I'll send you a list of fans in your state. The symbolic meaning of the pin will be sent with your order. So come on, fans, send in \$1.00 today, and—**LET'S KNOW EACH OTHER!**

#### Earl "Plaster" Parris

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"Oh, oh," Jess said excitedly, "this is it. The scope shows something—solidly!"

"Five hundred meters," Harley sang out.

Abruptly the air cleared and perfectly visible before the explorers lay the terrain of Venus! The cloud-layer was perfectly smooth, that blanket through which they had just passed. Somehow whitish, pale light filtered through the cloud-layer, illuminating the "acquain," for the land masses beneath them were in reality large islands surrounded by the unmistakable sheen of water.

Harley brought the rocket down without trouble, seating it cleverly on its jets with the skill born of long practice. The tail guides sank deep into the soft ground. Suited and armed the two men stepped out of their ship. Air samples would come later.

Through Harley's phones crackled Jess's voice. "To your left, Harley! Look! Something's coming!"

Harley swung around, his blaster-rifle at the ready, prepared to fire if necessary. Some strange creature was running toward them.

And as the running figure drew near them, Harley gasped with surprise. It was a human being!

He glanced at Jess and saw him staring unbelieving. "What—what—" Jess started to say.

Then the stranger was on them.

Harley's diaphragms vibrated with the sound of a voice. The words were high and clear and held such a tone of happiness or joy that he could hardly believe them.

"Thank God," the voice cried out, "thank God, you've come!"

Harley stared at the man who faced them. Unmistakably he was an Earthman. His manner and bearing were so familiar. He wore a crude garment of some tattered material, but on his wrist was a conventional wrist-watch!

"I'm Professor Joseph Loring," the stranger said, tears of joy streaming down his face, "and believe your eyes. Yes, I'm an Earthman, the first one to cross interplanetary space. You may have read four years ago about the disappearance—I was working on a time-machine! And I warped space as well as time..."

★ ★ ★

### THE BULL-HEADED GYROSCOPE

**EVERYBODY**, including Aunt Tillie, has, at one time or another played with that fascinating half-dollar toy called a gyroscope. Consisting of nothing more than a heavy die-cast wheel mounted in a simple set of gimbals which permit it to swing freely, the gyroscope is not particularly impressive, and as a rule, after Daddy plays with it a while, watching it react so oddly, balance on a string and so on, he quickly forgets about it.

But the gyroscope is one thing as a

toy—as an important element of modern science it is another. In some respects, the gyro might be called the "conscience" of instrumentation.

The gyro is (in auto-pilots, ship-stabilizers, scientific instruments) essentially a small heavy wheel with a large moment of inertia (all the weight is on the rim) and it spins at a high speed driven by a jet of air or by an electric motor. The string-winding kind is good only for demonstrations.

There it is, simple enough to see. Ah, but it's behavior is another thing. A spinning gyro freely mounted, will keep its axis aligned with the axis of the Earth! This astounding property is what makes the auto-pilot. It means that a moving plane or ship has an absolute reference even though it isn't near land or is high in the air. That's the gyro-compass.

In addition, another amazing property of the little spinning wheel is its extraordinary inertia when constrained in its mounting. You stick the spinning wheel on a string and expect it to fall down. Instead, it spins in a ponderous circle at right angles to two of its axes! It's positively un-natural. It can't be—but it is.

They tell the story of the comedian—there's one in every group of physicists who mounted a battery powered gyro in a suitcase and then took it with him on a trip. The red-cap picked up the suit-case and started to carry it to the train. It may have seemed odd but he thought nothing of it—until he tried to abruptly turn a corner. He turned but the gyro in the suit-case kept going straight!

This intense inertia is used as is well known to stabilize pitching rolling ships and planes. Bomb-sights make use of the stability. It is in this respect that the gyro exhibits a conscience. It is insistent on behaving in one certain way—always and at all places. And so in its way, it is important to technology—it's the only object that does this.

When rocketry—interplanetary stuff, that is—gets going with a bang, you can rest assured that the gyro is going to be right up there in front. Already in V-2's, Neptunes, Wac Corporals and a dozen other types of missiles and rockets, the gyro has acted as the guiding brain. The Lunar rocket will certainly make use of the gyro, both as a stabilizer and a stellar "compass." But it is also likely that it will be extremely important as a simple device for rotating a rocket on its axis without using the rocket tubes.

And such things come out of childrens' toys!

★ ★ ★

### NEVER MAKE A GUESS...

**SCIENTIFIC** thinking is full of wrong guesses and incorrect theories. But this doesn't mean that science is necessarily unoperative. Far from it—for the

wrong theories not only often lead to the right answers, but they even enable the right things to be done.

An automobile driver doesn't have to know how the car works in order to drive it. And so it is with many scientific ideas. A particularly classic example has just been recently exposed and the scientific world is re-examining its position—above all, in the little understood field of friction.

Everybody is familiar with the lubricating properties of graphite. This allotropic form of carbon is big business today, being used for so many different things, but as a lubricant it is especially well-known. When you spread graphite powder over a couple of metal surfaces they slide and slip around with no trouble and practically no friction.

When you examine graphite under the microscope you see that it consists of minute flat scales or plates which slide, one over the other, and apparent give the material its lubricating power. And that's what scientists have always believed—the greasy oily properties of graphite were due to its shape. This tended to be confirmed by the fact that graphite could be used as a lubricant at high temperatures.

The brushes or electricity collectors of electric motors and generators have been made of graphite for a long time because they slide so smoothly over the copper commutators or slip-rings. A scientist studying this fact, made a discovery which entirely upset the theoretical apple-cart.

When small amounts of water vapor were sprayed on the brushes they worked fine! Carrying the thing to its logical conclusion it was found that one of the requisites for the successful lubricating faculties of graphite was the presence of water vapor!

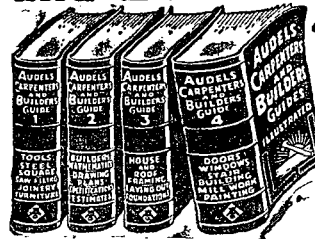
Studied analysis then led to the astounding fact, that the slipperiness of graphite is due to a thin layer of water molecules which cling to the material! This is completely new, a fact which no one had hitherto expected. It is completely different from any previous ideas held on the matter.

Already the discovery that the wrong idea had been held for so long, has caused the whole practice of graphite lubrication to change. Now techniques are being devised which spray graphite lubricators with water vapor or at least see that water vapor is present where the graphite is used.

What this new discovery means is that the use of graphite will be extended widely. It has been important—but now that the correct operation of the material is clear, it will be that much easier to make full use of the clever fact.

Science stumbles and bumbles along—but it does all right for itself!—even with wrong theories!

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# The Reader's FORUM



## THE DEFENSE RESTS

Dear Mr. Browne:

I think you were a little too rash in your editorial via "The Observatory" in the June issue of AS. Although the trend of "NEW" ideas did slow up considerably it does not mean the writers are directly at fault. No, I think it is mostly because there are a limited number of science fiction writers. New ideas I believe is not the cry of fandom, but *more time spent on the writing itself.*

The recent appearance of four or five new science-fiction magazines has been a great burden on the present writers, thus leaving them very little time to write. It seems as long as an author has a "name" in science fiction, his stories are increasingly sought. How can you blame the writer if the editors are only interested in his name and not the material he writes. And why should the writer waste too much time on one story when he knows he can sell it. And why should he try to think up "new" ideas when the editors of more than one magazine are screaming for any type from him.

Yes, competition is very "low" in SF because of the limited number of good writers. If the editors would only read through all the stories of the newer authors with an open mind, and read the works of the older writers with a blue pencil in one hand and their noses in the other! In this way it seems probable some better material would reach the news-

stands.

In the June Issue of AMAZING the story by Rog Phillips was below his usual standard. This proves my point. How can he possibly write so well when he is kept busy writing novels for Century Books and at the same time managing "The Club House".

Robert Abernathy's story "The Tower of Bable" was better than his "Ultimate Peril". But he doesn't seem to be under such pressure as Phillips, so he should turn out a good story.

I hope you have better luck in your search for better stories and newer writers.

Chas. A. Gervasi  
95 Chestnut St.  
Franklin, Mass.

*It seems to us there is some faulty reasoning here. No editor with the best interests of his readers and his magazine will buy a story simply because it was written by a "name". And the kind of writer editors "scream" for, is not the kind of writer who reasons that there's no point in thinking up "new ideas".*

*If, as your letter states, there is a limited number of good writers in the stf field today, then now is the time for the budding author to tackle a market that is crying for material. But let that budding author put real effort and thought into his work, let him make a serious effort to learn the business, be-*

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fore he mails any manuscript to an editor. For the moment he starts to reason that sloppy work will get past the editor who is hard pressed to find suitable stories—it is at that moment that the writer has assured himself of a form rejection slip. The same truth holds for long established "name" writers; but what you're overlooking is that such craftsmen don't reason that way. Not ever! —Ed.

### HORRIBLE EXAMPLE

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have just finished your editorial in the June issue of AS. You hit the nail right smack on the head. What has happened to our authors?

I can remember when I could pick up a stf mag and really enjoy a good story, but now...ugh! For an experiment, I looked at the opening lines of the first story, "Goddess of the Volcano". What I saw there made a sick feeling at my stomach. It went something like this... "Paul crouched, legs spread apart and bent, arms curved, waiting. His mad eyes glared at the two approaching figures. His lips opened in an effort he would need to get away!"...etcetera, etcetera, and ugh!!

This sort of slam-bang-drag-out beginning came over in Noah's Ark. Well, enough of this. To get to the brighter side of things, all the other stories were pretty good, and the front cover painting was "terrific". Let's have more of R. Gibson Jones.

I'll take time here to comment on the new articles. Personally, I think they're a great addition to your mag. After I finish the stories I turn to these for a dessert. Let's have more!

Here's hoping that in future months we'll see the mag that was here a few years ago.

Bill Arveson  
517 Segovia Avenue  
San Gabriel, California

Reader Arveson couldn't have picked a better example of what should be junked as a story opening. Blame the editor for allowing it to get into print. —Ed.

### THE BEST REASON

Dear Mr. Browne:

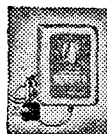
If I were asked why I like science-fiction, I don't believe I could answer to satisfaction. I just like it. It all started while I was in service. Wanting something to read, I wandered down to the PX and looked through the magazines on sale. I picked up a couple of comic books as usual and happened across a S-F mag. I leafed through it and read a few lines of one or two of the stories. Needless to say, I left the comic books behind and took along the S-F.

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Perhaps I am different than most, because I read them only for enjoyment. It is only confusion to go into mathematical theories with me. I can add, subtract, multiply, and divide, but that is the extent of my math. Also, as long as the action is fast, all the stories are interesting. For instance, I think that I would rather read a law book than another of Welles' novels.

I might add that in the April issue of AMAZING STORIES I liked "When Two Worlds Meet", "Let the Gods Decide", "Hereafter", "Let Freedom Ring", "Danger Is My Destiny", and "Satellite Secret". Allow me to compliment you on the vignettes you have mixed in with the stories. A very good idea.

Maybe I shouldn't be telling this but the easiest way I've found to get enough to satisfy my craving is to convert my friends to science fiction and then trade books with them.

R. E. Stech  
1607 Maplehurst.  
Mishawaka, Indiana

### GIVE THAT LADY A MAN!

Dear Sir:

I have been a reader of your magazine for some ten years. Never once in all that time can I remember one cover painting that pleased me. I am a woman and I feel that once in a while it would be nice to have a good-looking man on it. You always try to appeal to your male readers and I can understand that because the majority of your public is most likely men. Don't you suppose that at least one-third of your readers may be women? I think they are.

By the by, your stories have been getting better and better. Keep up the good work. And please try to make at least two or three covers a year that I can enjoy, too. Won't you please? Thank you.

Mrs. M. M. R.  
Brooklyn 12, New York

*We have no intention of slighting the distaff side of our readership. Surprisingly, most women seem to like the kind of fiction that appeals to the opposite sex, if you'll pardon the expression.* —Ed.

### HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

Dear Sir:

I just finished reading my better-than-ever, 194 page issue of AMAZING STORIES.

I have a few comments, however, I don't know how it happened, but your mag has improved 100% in the past six months. I always was an ardent reader, but now I'm eagerly awaiting each issue.

I am 17 years old and live in a government camp about 23 miles from the closet large town. There are about five S-F fans here and we really wear out each copy of

**AMAZING** before we are through with it!

Congratulations again on your mag.  
J. Richard Harris  
c/o Box 1111 U.S.B.R.  
Thermopolis, Wyoming

*We hasten to point out that improvements are seldom, if ever, accidental!*  
—Ed.

YOU HEARD THE LADY, MR. EDWARDS:

Dear Mr. Browne:

K. H. Edwards, the "Ohioan from Missouri", has incited a rebellion in this reader by stating in his letter, printed in your April '50 issue, quote, "flying saucers are hallucinations caused most likely by draining too many bottles...", unquote.

Information disproving this statement has been on the newsstands for the past two months, and one would think Edwards would look into the facts before he made such a silly observation. My hackles are positively vertical this minute, and people with his attitude cause it.

In between growls, I would like to take the opportunity of offering belated congratulations on your editorship of one of the best magazines on the market. AMAZING shows marked improvements, and there is nothing but praise coming from this quarter—with one exception. (There usually is one, isn't there?)

I wish you would put the facts back in the magazine at the end of each story, instead of those short yarns. The yarns are good, but the facts were something I could chew on and also read to my husband to forestall his asking why I read this kind of (not a nice word). Now, what can I do?

I agree with Robert Silverberg when he said that the female readers are envious of those girls in the pix. I am and will admit it, but that is not any reason to cut them down or out. To me, they are rather an inspiration to keep trim, especially when one's spouse whistles at them. So keep them in there.

"Danger is My Destiny", by Williams, is a story I will not forget in a hurry, and in my opinion the best in the issue. With "When Two Worlds Meet," also by Williams, running a close second, it would seem that I like Williams' style.

The whole issue was good, and if the present handling is any indication, AMAZING will never be in any danger of losing my quarter a month. Again congratulations.

Mrs. John R. Campbell, Jr.  
688 Jefferson, Apr. 8  
Memphis, Tennessee

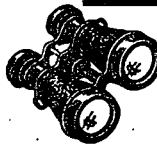
*We expect Mr. Edwards will have a few words to say. He'll need some solid logic, it appears, if he expects Mrs. Campbell to yell "uncle"!*  
—Ed.

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## EVERYBODY LEERS!

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have been debating on whether to write or not for some time. Your article in the June "Observatory"—helped to make up my mind.

First, I wish to say that I enjoy all the stories you print. I read all the magazines that are published in the science and fantasy fields and enjoy every one of them. Some more than others, of course, but all contain something enjoyable. I do not read just to tear apart as so many of your readers seem to do.

However, I do have one complaint, and that is the nude or nearly nude illustrations of girls. Why must they always be just barely covered? I hardly think that the world of the future will contain such scantily-clad girls! The climates would certainly have to undergo a drastic change. Understand that I like the illustrations with the exception of the "near nudes". Put all the girls you want in them, only please dress them! Men are not the only readers you have; a great deal of women read them too. But I'm rather tired of the way people (newsmen even) relatives and friends leer at me when I try to intrest them in science fiction. Their remarks are always the same, such as: "What's scientific about a nude woman?" I think quite a few readers will agree with me, even the men. After all, there are books of "that" sort to be bought.

Now, I'd like to suggest a few story ideas. They may have no value but for what they're worth, here they are.

How about a series of stories spaced about 50 to 100 years apart, telling in more detail what changes have been made and perhaps the steps leading up to those changes. That way we might understand what a "Zenox" blast is when we read of it.

Also, I have an idea that many years from now there will be a "World Government"; and that all the peoples of the earth will be of one color and race through inter-marriage. I'm not sure about the scientific part of this, but at least it is in the future. It would be interesting to read how this all comes to be, and what customs evolve from the many different customs of every race, we know today. I hope I have made my ideas clear enough, and do hope they will be of some help.

Mrs. Dorothy Vigor Okamura  
4943 North Sheridan  
Chicago, Illinois

*For the other side of the "cover-em-up" controversy, we call Mrs. Okamura's attention to the letter this month, from Mrs. John R. Campbell, Jr. —Ed.*

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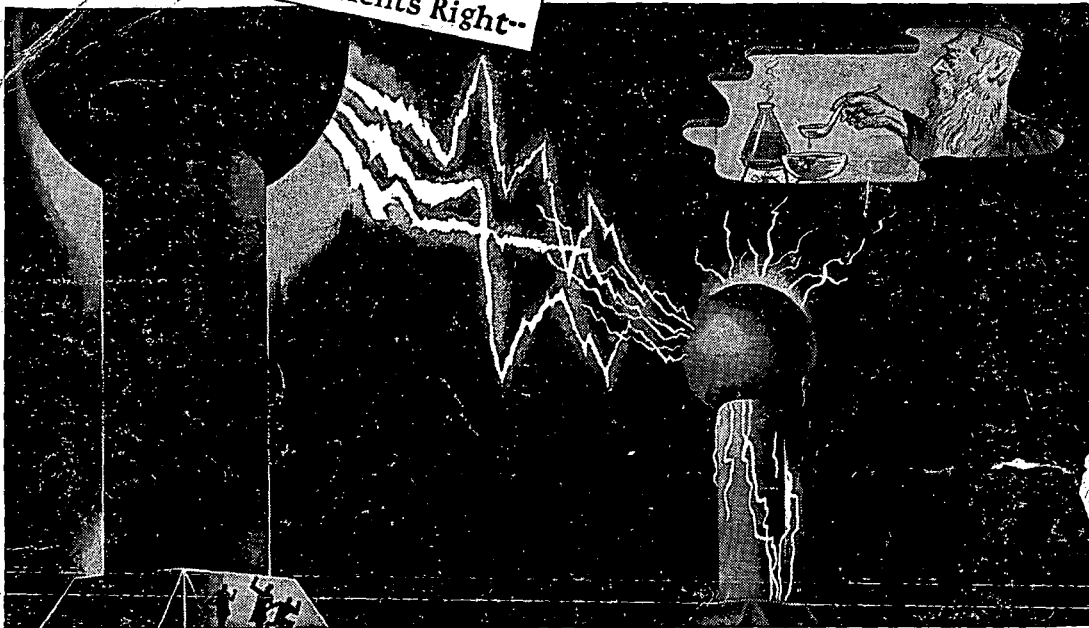
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